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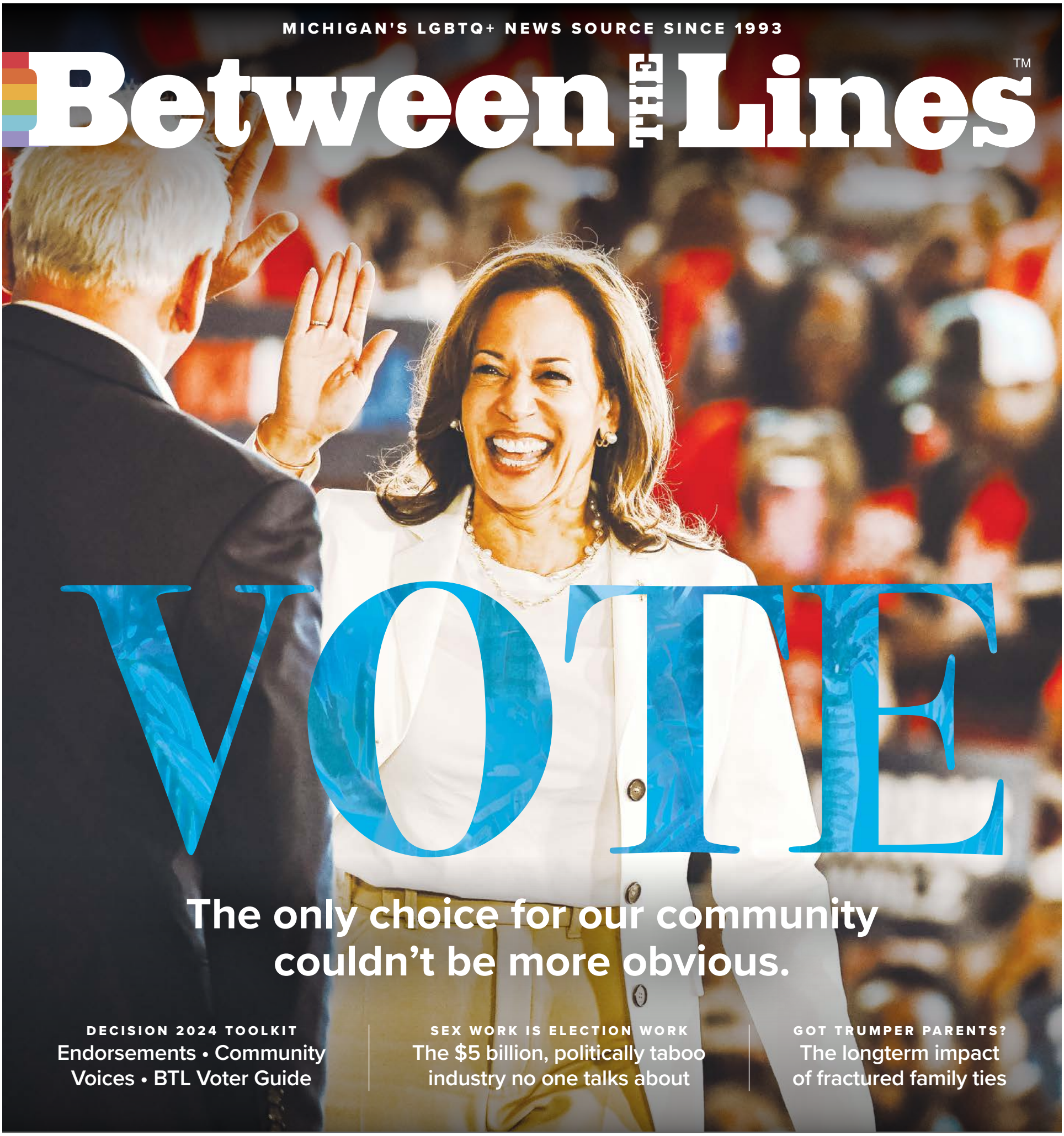

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Kamala Harris high fives Tim Walz at a Detroit rally in August. Photo: Andrew Potter

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5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY LIAM CLYMER

We're just a few days away from the general election on Nov. 5, and you know what that means — we've officially reached the point where everyone wants this to be over already. Recently, I read a headline about members of the Trump family going to a Taylor Swift concert despite his opposition to the singer and couldn't help but think, "How is this real life?" As we brace for the chaos of the final days of election season, filter out the noise with a film screening or a Chappell Roan-themed party.

Alyssa Edwards. Photo: Instagram/@@alyssaedwards_1

1 Attend a Halloween Ball with Alyssa Edwards

A Halloween Drag ball is fun enough, but one hosted by Alyssa Edwards is an opportunity you don't want to miss. For those who somehow are unaware of this queen's talent, Edwards is a multi-season "RuPaul's Drag Race" star and, as of this week, the "Global All Stars" winner. The queen even has her own Netflix show, "Dancing Queen," which highlights the drama of her dance career. With DJ Rockstar Aaron setting the mood and opportunities to meet Edwards and Michigan drag legend Aphrodite rounding out the night, the Ghouls and Dolls Halloween Ball is sure to be a blast.

Oct. 31, 8 p.m., Magic Stick (4120 Woodward Ave., Detroit). Snag tickets at bit.ly/4fcDaPE.

Allee Willis. Photo: Detroit Institute of Art

2 Watch 'The World According to Allee Willis' at the DIA

The late gay Detroit artist and songwriter Allee Willis takes center stage in a new film screening at the Detroit Institute of Art's Detroit Film Theatre. Explored through a collage of recordings detailing Willis, her family and career, "The World According to Allee Willis" depicts the queer creative's multifaceted mind. The film examines Willis' rise to great heights as she wrote iconic songs such as "September," "Boogie Wonderland" and the "Friends" theme song, all the while underscoring these moments with her battle to understand herself and where she fit into the gender and sexual norms of her time. This inspiring documentary is only showing at the DIA for a limited time, so get tickets now.

Nov. 16 and 17, showtimes vary, Detroit Film Theatre (5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit). Purchase tickets at dia.org/events/world-according-allee-willis.

3 Find New Opportunities at a Transgender Job Fair

It's hard enough to score a job, but factor in an identity that's under attack and hard suddenly becomes next to impossible. Transgender Michigan's job fair will feature employers, workshops, speakers and exhibits to even the playing field for transgender individuals. Transgender Michigan Director of Operations Susan Crocker said that the fair provides a safe space and connects job seekers to individuals interested in bringing on specifically trans voices. "Many trans people are fearful of applying for work due to discrimination, but this job fair bypasses this by having employers who want trans applicants," Crocker said. This is the only transgender job fair in Michigan, so polish up those résumés.

Nov. 14, 1-4 p.m., Affirmations (290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Find out more at transgendermichigan.org/trans-job-fair.

4

Embrace Beauty with En Femme Social Group

Grand Rapids Pride Center believes that by exploring both your masculine and feminine traits, you can live a more fulfilling and joyful life. That's the thinking that spurred the creation of En Femme Social Group, a crossdresser support group that aims to break down the assumptions about the artform through a welcoming environment and an open exchange of personal stories. Through the education of fellow crossdressers and their families, En Femme Social Group hopes to move attendees toward acceptance and create a safer world for crossdressers, trans women and gender nonconforming individuals as a whole. Celebrate your individuality with the group every first and third Friday of the month.

Nov. 1, 6-9 p.m., Grand Rapids Pride Center (343 Atlas Ave., Grand Rapids). Further details at grpride.org/pride-events/calendar.

5

A previous Chappell Roan-styled event. Photo: Party Iconic

Let Loose at Party Iconic's 'Hot To Go' Event

The Chappell Roan party of your dreams is coming to Detroit. Featuring music from Chappell Roan, Renée Rapp, MUNA and Lady Gaga, Party Iconic's "Hot To Go" event is bound to make you feel like you're dancing at the Pink Pony Club. The organization promises to provide a safe and inclusive space — as Roan says, "where boys and girls can all be queens every single day." Communications Manager Sam Bay said the event provides an opportunity for expression. "Whether your kink is karma or you're a Midwest princess, this night is all about embracing your truest self while dancing to the best femme sapphic pop hits. We'll be taking the stage at Saint Andrews Hall in Detroit on Saturday, November 2 — grab your tickets now because this party is H-O-T-T-O-G-O!"

Nov. 2, 8 p.m., Saint Andrew's Hall (431 E. Congress St., Detroit). Check it out at livemu.sc/3YaUVYQ.

FROM THE BTL STAFF

Why We're Endorsing Kamala Harris for President in 2024

And why it's not a compromise to elect 'imperfect allies'

Our community deserves hope, dignity and, especially, a break from political tactics designed to break our spirits, erase us from the pages of history and destroy the progress we've made. A vote for Kamala Harris, and for Democratic candidates up and down your ballot, isn't just a vote for a brighter more inclusive future for queer Americans — it's a stand for our right to live freely and safely.

We say this unequivocally while acknowledging that, by some measures, Harris is an imperfect LGBTQ+ ally — as are the vast majority of garden-variety Democratic candidates. Too often, LGBTQ+ community members are tokenized by political candidates and used as props, only to be discarded when the polls close. In this strange election cycle, LGBTQ+ topics are both front-and-center when it comes to abhorrent political rhetoric blasting through ad after ad on radio and TV, but were almost completely left out of important conversations on the debate stage. Republicans have spent upwards of $65 million on anti-LGBTQ+ ads this year alone. Mostly, Democrat candidates are shy allies on this front. There's a clear and obvious distinction between the parties, but there isn't a particularly visible pushback to hateful GOP attacks. So yes, Harris hasn't been as visibly as supportive as we'd like. However, she doesn't have to be a perfect ally to be a powerful one.

The reality is that there is no perfect candidate — and the LGBTQ+ community is not a monolith; as a group, we hold many individual needs and desires. With Harris, we see real opportunity to build onto hard-earned equality, in all aspects of life for LGBTQ+ people. Remember, once upon a time, former President Obama did not support same-sex marriage but eventually broadened his outlook. Harris is certainly lightyears ahead of where we were 16 years ago and seems to genuinely want to get it right.

Election Day is Nov. 5. Visit vote411.org and michiganvoting.org to learn about the candidates and issues on your ballot and to make a voting plan.

Kamala Harris. Illustration: BigStock

Speaking at a campaign rally in Detroit in August that BTL attended, Harris reaffirmed her dedication to the LGBTQ+ community as she spoke on "hard-fought" freedoms. "Our fight is a fight for the future and it is a fight for freedom," she said. "Across our nation we are witnessing a full-on attack on hard-fought, hard-won fundamental freedoms and rights and we will not stand for it." One of those challenged liberties, she said, was "the freedom to love who you love openly and with pride."

Harris' approach is a solid start, one that offers a glimmer of hope that was almost impossible to find even a few months ago. There's a strong possibility that she, too, will become the kind of staunch ally we need in the White House right now and that we'll see her fight back more vocally against anti-LGBTQ+ legislation over her years in office, eventually becoming more vocal in her support, especially when it comes to protecting transgender Americans.

In a highly divided political climate, the fact is that our votes are often as much about voting against something as they are about voting for something. This year, we're in the rare spot where we get to do both. We're voting for a brighter collective future and against dark, Trump-era despair. This country isn't "great" for everyone, but it can be better for all of us. That's a kind of Midwestern pragmatism we can enthusiastically get behind.

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(bik-TAR-vee)

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KEEP BEING YOU®

Why Gay Men Should Feel Seen in a Black Woman President

And how a Black woman president breaks the glass ceiling for them, too

Kamala Harris at a campaign rally in Detroit. Photo: Andrew Potter

BY JAMIE VALENTINO

I didn't make my first Black friend until eighth grade — a girl named Danisha Melendez, who sat in front of me in Language Arts. We constantly cracked each other up with inside jokes, often with me borrowing her slang and culture, if not outright imitating it.

"It's because I'm Black!" she'd quip when she failed an exam or was told to quiet down when we were both laughing.

Of course, sometimes it felt more relevant than others, but I failed to understand the lived experiences behind her jest, especially as the only Black person in our class. Every day at lunch, the cafeteria was visibly divided, with all the Black kids sitting together in one section, an unspoken yet normalized high school clique, at least in Miami. Danisha was among them, and our closeness felt like a secret, even when we said hi in passing.

Danisha was one of the people I hugged the hardest on the last day of school, and I think she felt it too. We most likely wouldn't see each other again, as if there was nothing we could do about it. Ironically, I had mostly female friends, but the difference in our skin color made it feel like we belonged to different worlds — ones that peddled equality but couldn't figure out how to materialize the vocabulary into action. The ripple effects of systemic racism were tough to swim against when many people, including me, were oblivious to how we conformed to it or contributed.

Growing up as a light-skinned Latin person in Miami's suburbs made it easy to escape my marginalization. Coming out as

gay at 20 in New York City gifted me that same privilege again. However, a decade later, I'm grateful to understand that Kamala Harris isn't just breaking the presidential glass ceiling for Black women but also for all the queer people they've uplifted along the way. I don't think people should vote for Harris solely because she's a Black woman, but it should make it that much sweeter for anyone who's ever faced oppression, especially considering so much of gay culture was built off Black culture.

As an adult, my Black female friends have inspired me to stand up for myself, throw shade when it's due, and be unapologetic. "Boys Come First" author Aaron Foley shares with me a similar experience growing up in Detroit: "Black women have always had to assert themselves, to remind the people around them, whether white people, Black men or even their peers, that they are human. That they are somebody, right? No nonsense about it."

He adds that there's a "hereditary self-confidence and self-awareness" that is aspirational for many marginalized people. So why is that bravery lost for many cis white gay men when it's our turn to stand up for them and see ourselves in their struggle, despite the nuance? "Someone had to open that door and launch a different way of being in the highest office," says Foley. "So when the Harris campaign and Kamala HQ are doing all the queer outreach, it's affirming and validating of that [mutual allyship]."

It's true, for a cis hetero woman, Kamala Harris has the gayest presidential campaign in history, at least online. I can't help but imagine a bunch of twinks in suits typing away in her office. It's an ironic flip of the script, considering that only a decade ago TIME magazine was publishing headlines like "Dear White Gays: Stop Stealing Black Female Culture" and "Dear Black Women: White Gays Are Your Allies, So Don't Push Us Away."

Beyond influencing modern drag, ballroom and gay slang, Foley says Black women have served as pioneers for the queer community in Hollywood. Diana Ross incorporated drag into her work long before Chappell Roan (Ross' hit "I'm Coming Out" was inspired by a tribute from local drag queens), Patti LaBelle promoted AIDS awareness during the 1980s and bisexual cabaret icon Josephine Baker's worked as a spy for the French government to defeat the Nazis (who also persecuted queer people) during World War II. Though sometimes tokenized, Marsha P. Johnson might be the name most associated with gay rights, but the movement hasn't credited all the Blackness it stands on.

Now, it's a Black woman tapping into gay culture to propel her highly qualified candidacy forward while choosing a vice president who has dedicated part of his career to advocating for LGBTQ+ people. The Democratic Party, for the first time in a long while, has understood the assignment. The question is, will the gays?

Filmmaker Michael Rice amplifies the most marginalized and vulnerable voices in America with the power of filmmaking. He has produced documentaries such as "Black As U R," which highlights the lack of attention paid to crimes against the Black queer community, and "ParTy Boi: Black Diamonds in Ice Castles," urging the silent crisis of meth use and addiction within queer communities of color. He tells me that Black women are second only to Black trans people at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to visibility and being heard. Still, he adds that Black women have often served as peace-line barriers, bridging the gap between Black and white queer people and the Black hetero world, especially during eras like the Harlem Renaissance and in conservative spaces and within their own families.

> *"Now, it's a Black woman tapping into gay culture to propel her highly qualified candidacy forward while choosing a vice president who has dedicated part of his career to advocating for LGBTQ+ people. The Democratic Party, for the first time in a long while, has understood the assignment. The question is, will the gays?"*

The documentarian says Black women's blood, sweat and tears run deep in the U.S. "They have been the country's backbone since its conception," says Rice. "Black women made up the majority of indentured and enslaved labor. They were forced to breastfeed their masters' children while unable to breastfeed their own."

Rice believes gay culture borrowing from Black culture without solidarity is cosplaying at best and supporting inequality at worst. "[White cis gay men] go to drag shows. They'll try to read people. They'll snap their fingers and do all the things you'd recognize as traits of a sassy Black girl, but then they're still dwelling in white privilege or white supremacy," he says.

Throughout history, Black women have always been at the forefront of LGBTQ+ rights, Rice explains. Their national impact is invaluable, and yet it has mostly gone thankless. "You fight inequality through reflective moments and small actions — by recognizing when an injustice is happening or when there's an opportunity to give credit where it's due. That's how you rectify the situation," says Rice.

The opportunity has finally presented itself for gay men to fight for Black women, many of them our queer sisters, like they've fought for us. Speaking with Foley and Rice inspired me to track down Danisha after 17 years, who, thankfully, remembers our friendship as fondly as I do.

On a phone call, I apologized to her.

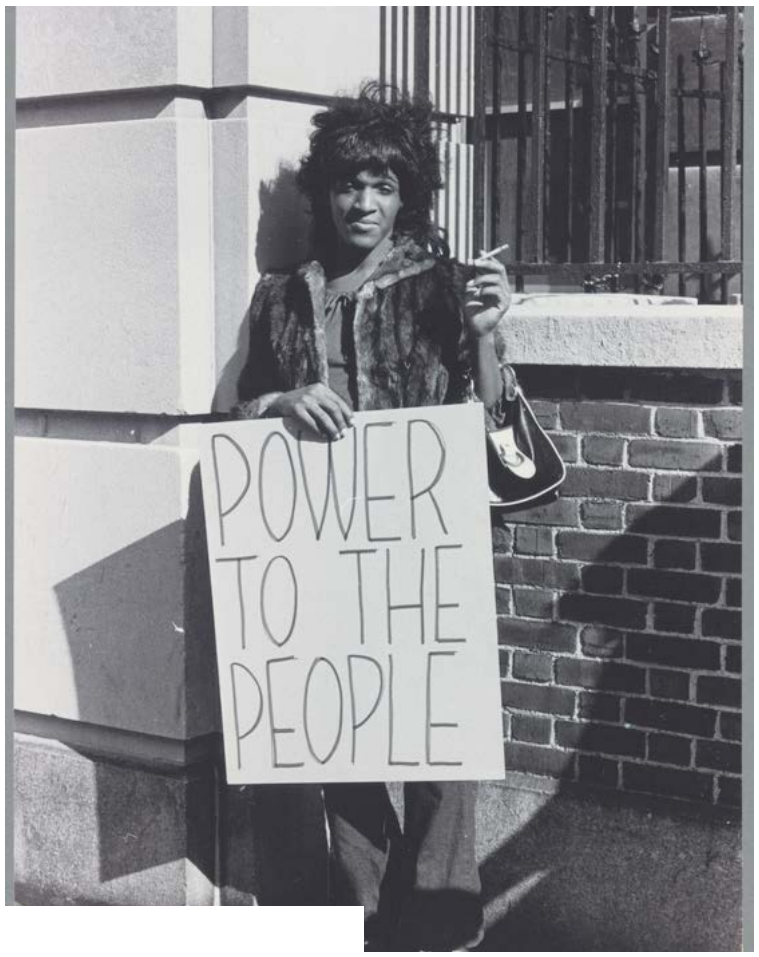
"We were definitely problematic," she responds, laughing. "But we were just kids, and I knew the difference between you trying to find a genuine connection and someone who was just a racist asshole."

Danisha coincidentally came out as bisexual around the same time I came out as gay, and she says she always had a feeling about me but kept silent out of respect. Maybe that's why I used her as a safe space to escape the persona I had created and become someone else — even if it was a Black woman.

On the topic of gay allyship of Blackness, she says white gays need to do more, and society needs to stop being afraid of holding them accountable. "Just because someone is gay doesn't mean they don't have racism instilled within them, and they don't benefit from the system," says Danisha. "They might even get away with microaggressions more than white straight men."

In regards to the upcoming election, Kamala Harris has propelled the opposing side to use the phrase "It's because she's Black" more often than not to explain why people are voting for her. Speaking with all the parties above made me realize it's partly true, as it's because she's a Black woman that she works twice as hard, understands the issues of everyday Americans, and effortlessly stands up to a lawless predator who threatens democracy or demonstrates lunacy with nearly every speech. It's why Trump has tried so hard to discredit her identity.

In one way or another, I'd venture to say nearly every person in America has benefited from the fingerprints of a Black woman, so it's about time their handshake becomes presidential.

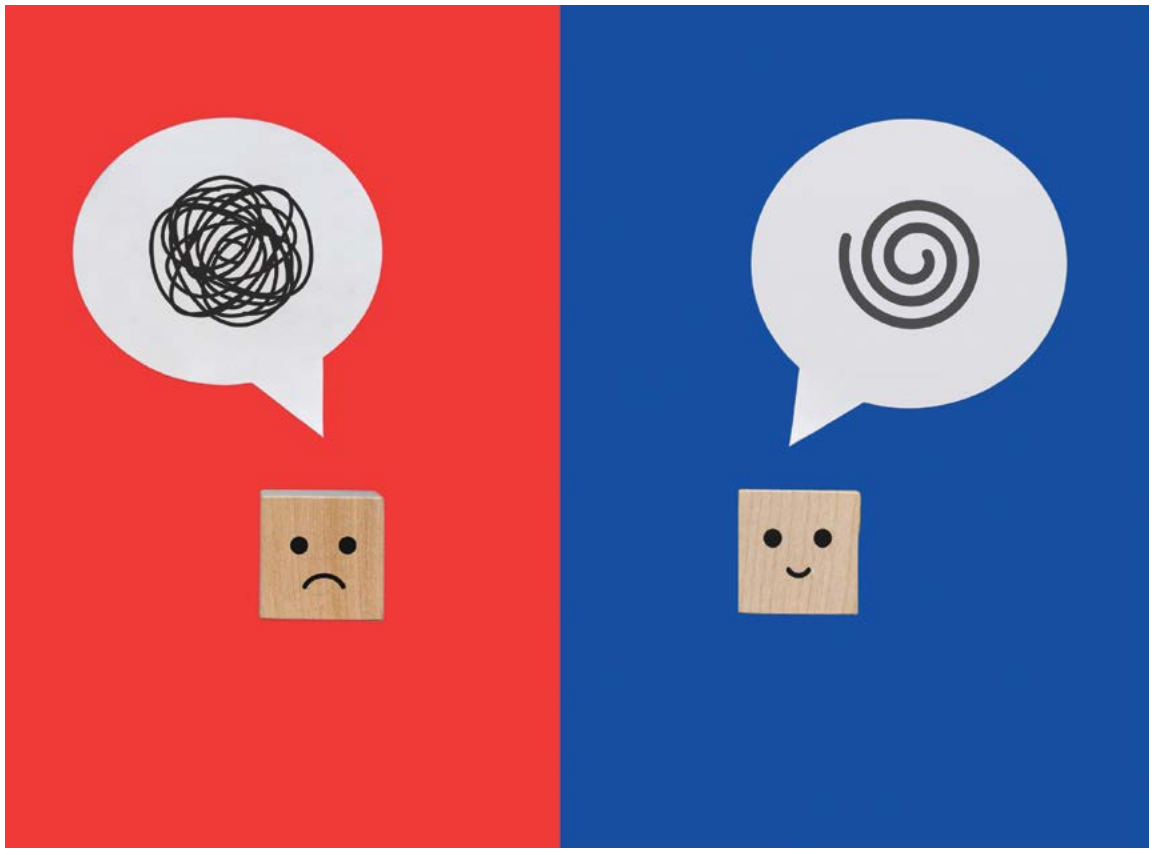


Marsha P. Johnson. Photo: Public Domain

When Your Parents Are Trumpers

During this election especially, queer voters face family rifts over political beliefs

BY JORDYN BRADLEY



Having a house divided by maize and blue and green and white is one thing. But when the colors are red and blue, and the opinions differ on things like gender-affirming health care, protecting queer identities and spaces, as well as the right to an abortion, those opinions bridge more than a belief or a (mostly harmless) rivalry — they can feel like personal attacks.

For many Gen Z and millennial individuals, that is the daily reality of having conservative parents whose beliefs and values don't align with their own. According to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), Gen Z and millennial adults (21%) are less likely than Gen Xers (28%), baby boomers (32%) and members of the Silent Generation (31%) to identify as Republican.

And those differing beliefs can — and likely will — become central to the outcome of this presidential election. For these young people, the different beliefs represent more than a vote on a ballot; they represent hurt and an unwillingness on the part of older generations to listen to why.

Jay Kaplan believes America is so split politically and socially because our leaders often highlight volatility for us, versus understanding other sides and perspectives.

"We don't know a way to be able to civilly talk about these things and the hurt that comes from our differences," says Kaplan, staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan's LGBTQ+ Rights Project. "I think that's partly because some of our leaders have been so quick to otherize or marginalize people that don't share those points of view, too."

Ren Anteau of Ann Arbor knows firsthand what that is like. Anteau, 28, cut their father out of their life due in part to his harmful beliefs and unwavering support of far-right ideals and conspiracies, like QAnon.

"As a queer person, it had been a point of contention ever since I came out [at 16]," they said. "He's always been conservative, but ever since the 2016 election, our relationship got worse and worse. We had an argument during [that] election that brought me to tears because of his indifference to policy and rhetoric that directly impacted me and the communities I'm part of. It makes me feel relieved to not have to do that this time around."

Anteau says that it's impossible for them to imagine their father understanding or respecting their perspective, as he believes being gay is a choice Anteau is actively making.

"The most that I ever hoped for was that he would respect me, my life and my views, and he couldn't even do that," says Anteau. Toward the end of their relationship, Anteau says it was scary to see how radical his views had gotten.

Some argue that blood is thicker than water and contrasting opinions should not come between families. Others would rather avoid cyclical heated arguments. As a result, many folks bite their tongues at the dinner table or try to avoid political topics completely.

Kaleigh, 30, of Mason County, who asked that we only include her first name, says her family has an unspoken "don't ask, don't tell" policy on topics relating to politics and, ironically, her queerness.

"That used to be enough for me since I was just happy that my family hadn't disowned me when I came out — the bar is low, I know," she tells BTL. "But, lately, as I feel more and more comfortable in my queerness as I come into my 30s, the 'don't ask, don't tell' mentality isn't enough for me. I want my family to love me for the entirety of who I am, not just part of me."

Many parents of queer children, including Kaleigh's, express that their conservative leanings aren't necessarily personal, but for "the economy and businesses."

"What I hear when they say that is, 'I care more about protecting my money than protecting my daughter's rights as a queer woman.' That hurts me," she says.

Annabel, 24, of Chicago, who asked that we only include her first name, has had similar disagreements with her father, a staunch Trump supporter. She says they "get into screaming matches" frequently because they are both strong-willed in their beliefs.

"It is hard for me because my dad allegedly is more left-leaning when it comes to social issues like abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, but these issues are not more important to him than things like taxes," she says. "It obviously hurts to know that as a woman in the LGBTQ+ community, the looming threat of Project 2025 and the harm of another four years of Trump on me and my communities does not matter to him. Even when I try to explain these things to him, he refuses to accept it as fact."

If she knew he would listen to her, Annabel says she'd like to sit her father down and explain the impact and looming danger if Project 2025 is enacted. But she doubts she'd have the opportunity to plead her case without a rebuttal or interruption.

"When someone you care about is supporting somebody whose beliefs and values and ethics really go against yours and actually pose a threat to you, I can understand how that's a very tough bridge to try to cross," says Kaplan.

Kaplan also says a component of young voters having differing opinions and views from their parents is due to them actually having fewer rights than their parents had at their age.

"Look at what has happened in the last two years. They have less rights than women, and even in some cases than transgender men did 50 years ago, thanks to the overturning of Roe v. Wade. And that should be a concern. There's been expanded civil rights protections or recognized constitutional rights, but this is a situation where the younger people, particularly those who can have children, have less rights," says Kaplan.

The opposition to IVF as a way to start or continue a family also poses a threat to young people unable to conceive for a multitude or reasons.

There's little evidence that conservative parents tend to change their viewpoints when their children come out as queer, but Ken and Amber Long of Royal Oak may offer some hope. When the couple, who were once self-described Republican, Evangelical Christians, noticed how welcoming the conservative Evangelical community was of "a certain political candidate," they say they felt alienated for not aligning with those beliefs, which ultimately pushed them to hold a much more progressive outlook.

Today, the Longs, who are parents of a transgender daughter, urge parents of other queer children to listen to their kids and the issues that matter to them. "Your kid is still your kid," says Amber. "It's not some huge boogeyman that some people make it out to be — it's your kid."

LGBTQ Rights and Respect Have Been Strengthened by the Michigan Supreme Court

As the guardian of justice, fairness, and freedoms in our state, the Michigan Supreme Court plays an essential role in ensuring equality for all. This year, Michigan voters get to choose who fills two spots on the Michigan Supreme Court, and we all have a civic duty to vote for the two candidates we think will make the best decisions on behalf of all citizens.

The LGBTQ community has been granted important civil rights by the Michigan Supreme Court. It's no secret that members of this community still face discrimination, but recent decisions by Michigan's highest court have helped secure important protections against bias and unfair treatment for LGBTQ folks.

The Michigan Supreme Court ruled in 2022 that the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, a law enacted in 1976, bans firing, evicting, or discriminating against someone in any way because they are a member of the LGBTQ community. Advocates worked for many years to get this case before the Michigan Supreme Court, which ruled that the law's ban on discrimination based on the basis of sex includes sexual orientation.

In 2023, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that judges must use the preferred pronouns of defendants, litigants, attorneys, and others in the courtroom. The Michigan Supreme Court was the first in the nation to require this change through court rules, which respects the dignity of all people. In fact, although the ruling especially impacts transgender and nonbinary folks, it also respects those who choose not to recognize people's preferred pronouns, allowing them to refer to "the defendant" or "the plaintiff." This is the kind of fairness and equity all Michiganders deserve.

Although these rulings were specific to the LGBTQ community, the Michigan Supreme Court makes decisions on critical issues that impact everyone. This includes civil rights for all, as well as environmental regulations, criminal justice, economic regulations, and more. In fact, the Michigan Supreme Court is the ultimate decider on the most complex and consequential cases in our state.

The two candidates who win their elections this year will have a major voice in how Michigan's future unfolds, along with the rest of the seven-person court. Each justice is elected for eight-year terms, which means your vote will help shape the future of our state for years to come.

Michigan is one of only 24 states that empowers the people to vote for their state Supreme Court. It's a big responsibility, so it's important to do your homework about the candidates so you know which two best reflect your values and the kind of Michigan you want to live in.

But you have to do more than your homework. You must manually select your two choices for the open seats on the Michigan Supreme Court. Feel free to vote a straight-party ticket – but don't stop there. Look for the non-partisan section of your ballot. That's where you'll find the candidates for the Michigan Supreme Court. They're nominated by a political party, but their affiliation is not listed on the ballot.

Don't miss your chance to play a role in making sure the Michigan Supreme Court is made up of qualified justices who will put the best interests of everyday Michiganders first – no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion, or any other aspect of their lives. Choose candidates with integrity and a strong track record of fairness and justice for all.

Get more information about the Michigan Supreme Court, the voting process, and how to tell others about the importance of voting for the people who will sit on our state's highest court. Visit www.MISupremeCourtRocks.com to find everything you need to make an educated decision on your ballot in November.

-Erin Knott, Equality Michigan Executive Director

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Paid for by Engage Michigan, 2727 2nd Ave., Detroit, MI 48201

Life Under Trump Was Not Better and I Promise You It Will Be Even Worse If He Wins

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

As Nov. 5 approaches, I, for one, am dreading the election and at the same time yearning for it to be over. The result is that I am suspended in a purgatory of sorts, where time moves simultaneously ever so slowly and at light speed.

I was at my medical oncologist's office for a routine visit and the TV in the waiting room was tuned to home and garden fare as always. I was seated next to the TV, so I could hear it but not see it. And every commercial break there was an ad that began "life was better under Trump" and a woman going on to explain that she'd never voted for Trump before but was voting for him now because he'll keep us safe, or some shit.

And I couldn't help but look around at the waiting room and think that if it were up to Trump, many of these people wouldn't be here because they'd either be denied insurance with cancer as a preexisting condition or they might be insured with one of those "junk policies" the Affordable Care Act sought to do away with. You know, the policies that barely cover anything. The ones Republicans think are perfect for the young and the healthy who have not a health care in the world. As if catastrophe doesn't strike indiscriminately. You can't plan for cancer, let alone for a debilitating car accident or being struck by a bullet in the next mass shooting.

> *If any queer person thinks that there's some kind of magical line between [Republicans] and trans people that oppression and hate can't cross, think again.*

I was only 36 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Up until then I'd never had any serious health concerns. Every time I go to the doctor I am grateful that I have good insurance.

Then there's how Trump handled — or, rather, did not bother to handle — the COVID-19 epidemic. People were dying in droves, especially Black patients, while Trump was secretly sending his BFF Russian President Vladimir Putin testing machines we really could have used here in the U.S. Then Trump made states fight against each other "Hunger Games"-style for the very limited safety equipment and medical supplies that were to be had, which astronomically raised the cost of these goods.

As far as keeping the U.S. safe, surely I am not the only one who watched in horror as Trump nonchalantly tweeted about nuclear war with North Korea or when he wanted Black Lives Matter protestors shot.

So, yeah, life was not better under Trump. Unless you were super rich. Then things were probably pretty good.

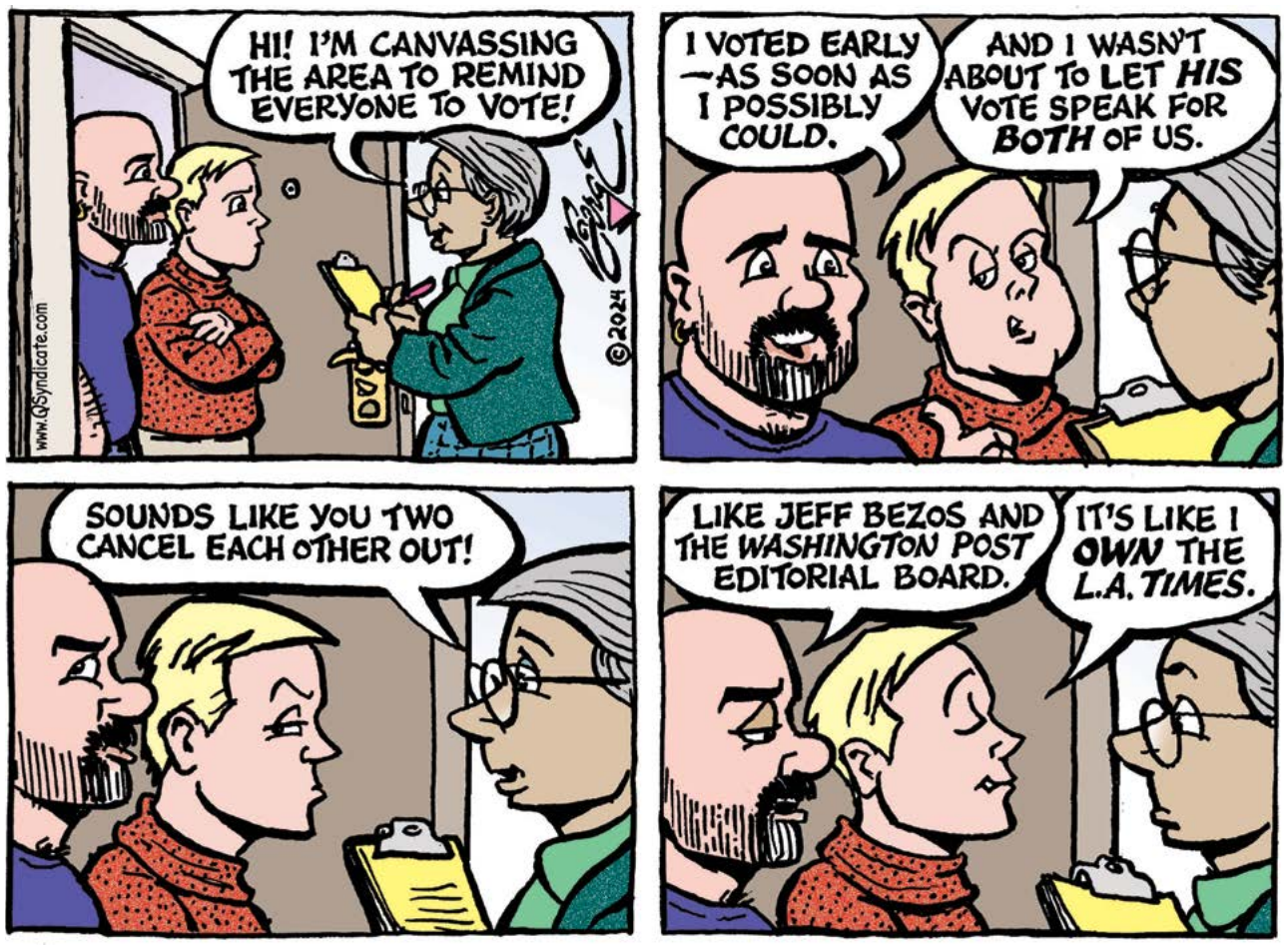
What's wild is that a second Trump term would be worse. There won't be any experienced professionals around who can temper his worst impulses. Project 2025 lays out very clearly that all experienced government employees be replaced with people loyal to Trump.

Oh, and that's another thing about that damn ad I heard so many times. Republicans keep trying to say that Trump has nothing to do with Project 2025, but many of the people who put it together worked in Trump's administration or work for right-wing think tanks that Trump looked to when it came to choosing Supreme Court justices. You know, the ones who overturned Roe v. Wade the very first chance they got.

The ad also said that Trump has clearly stated that he will not pass a national abortion ban. Which is bullshit. He will have zero political consequences for banning abortion and no incentive to push back against bans. He proudly brags that he overturned Roe v. Wade. And now there are horror stories everywhere about people bleeding out in hospital parking lots or being forced to carry babies that will not survive outside of the womb and will die a painful death.

And the way that Trump talks about transgender people is abhorrent. He's really leaning into anti-trans hate as his campaign winds down. And if any queer person thinks that there's some kind of magical line between them and trans people that oppression and hate can't cross, think again. A perfect example is the Log Cabin Republicans, a group of gay Republicans who claim that they are building a more inclusive Republican Party. LCR has enthusiastically endorsed Trump (again) and has explicitly tossed trans people to the political wolves, echoing the anti-trans talking points that are used to justify legislating trans people out of existence.

I wish I had some clever way to wrap up this column, telling you to "make a plan to vote" and "vote Republicans out." And you should absolutely do those things. Still, I am not going to pretend like beating back the fascism taking hold of so much of the U.S. is in any way easy. But it is essential.


HI! I'M CANVASSING THE AREA TO REMIND EVERYONE TO VOTE!
www.GJSyndicate.com
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I VOTED EARLY —AS SOON AS I POSSIBLY COULD.
AND I WASN'T ABOUT TO LET HIS VOTE SPEAK FOR BOTH OF US.
SOUNDS LIKE YOU TWO CANCEL EACH OTHER OUT!
LIKE JEFF BEZOS AND THE WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL BOARD.
IT'S LIKE I OWN THE L.A. TIMES.

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

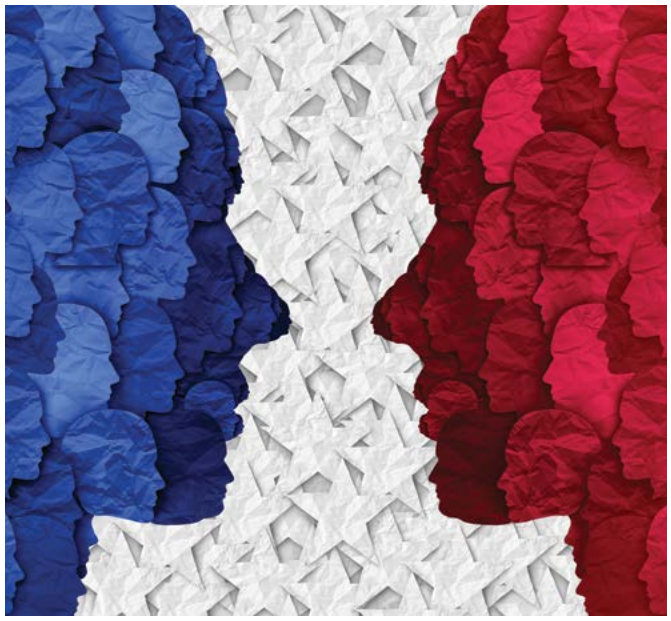
Community Voices Shine Bright in Candidate Survey, Community Essays

If the results of our 2024 candidate survey and the number of community essays we've received are an indication, LGBTQ+ community members and allies are fired up. It's easy to understand why. So much is at stake, including the balance of a Michigan House of Representatives that has delivered a growing list of victories for Michigan's queer community.

It is heartening to recognize the enormous contributions of time, resources and emotional labor candidates and politically active community members throughout the Great Lakes State have made, and will continue to make, on behalf of our community. In response to the survey, candidates thoughtfully responded to topics like transgender and reproductive rights, education, economic stability, housing insecurity and more. We even quizzed candidates on how they feel about drag queens in 2024 — a topic that has elicited surprisingly deep responses. In the essays you'll find in this issue and at pridesource.com, community members dig deep to discuss the real-world impacts of the 2024 election.

We invite you to read these perspectives and to consider Equality Michigan Action Network's list of 2024 endorsed candidates at equalitymiaction.org/2024-endorsements. The stakes could hardly be higher. Make a plan to vote, and encourage your network to vote through in-person early voting, mail-in absentee ballot or in person by 8 p.m. Nov. 5, when the polls close.

Visit pridesource.com/topics/opinions/2024-election-perspectives to read candidate surveys and community perspectives.



MAGA Gays Claim 'We're Past' the Need to Advocate for LGBTQ+ Equality

Ahead of the election, conservative LGBTQ+ supporters of Donald Trump are holding "Trump UNITY" events across battleground states including Michigan. A recent event, organized by the Log Cabin Republicans, prioritized economic issues over LGBTQ+ rights, with gay conservatives emphasizing financial concerns. "I'm not voting because of marriage equality or LGBTQ rights," attendee Gage West, 23, told NBC News. "I'm voting because I want more money in my wallet."

For many attendees, equality was seen as already achieved, with one attendee telling NBC, "We're past that… my focus is on my kids and the economy." However, LGBTQ+ advocates criticize these events, pointing to Trump-era policies, including banning trans military service, removing LGBTQ+ healthcare protections, appointing anti-equality judges, opposing the Equality Act and limiting LGBTQ+ worker protections.

Queer Bar Uplift Opens in Ann Arbor

A much-anticipated new queer bar, Uplift, is open for business in downtown Ann Arbor. A social media post late last week promised the space will be "your new go-to spot for delicious drinks, engaging events and unapologetically queer vibes." Regular events will include trivia, karaoke, and viewing and dance parties.

Co-owner Saharsh Hajela told BTL earlier this year that his vision for Uplift is a space where, "After work, you can head over and have a great conversation in a warm, inviting place, but on weekends, when you're looking for a place to go out late at night without having to drive outside the city, we can provide that, too." Hajela added that the extensive bar menu will include a focus on craft mocktails.

Uplift is located at 210 S. First Street in downtown Ann Arbor on the main floor. Open Monday, 4 p.m.-12 a.m.; Tuesday-Friday, 4 p.m.-2 a.m. and Saturday-Sunday, 12 p.m.-2 a.m.

Rachel Crandall Crocker Awarded National Honor

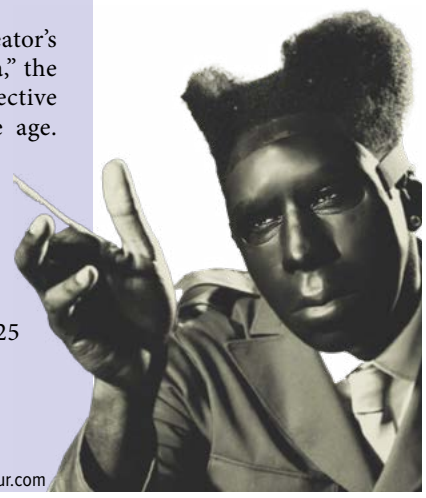
Rachel Crandall Crocker, Michigan trans advocate and executive director of Transgender Michigan, was recently honored by the National Alliance of Social Workers (NASW) with its prestigious Pioneer Award. NASW-Michigan wrote on Facebook that Crandall Crocker's "dedication and remarkable contributions have left an indelible mark on not just the social work profession, but to the world." Learn more about Crandall Crocker's work and the award at bit.ly/4hnAGzS.

Knock Doors with Michigan Dems

In the waning days of the election, armies of Michigan volunteers will canvass neighborhoods urging voters to make their voices heard. Visit mobilize.us/swingleft/event/731775 to find an event near you, including knocking doors with Michigan Dems in support of candidates up and down the ballot, joining a phone bank, and other opportunities for refocusing your pre-election energy.

Snatch Tickets for Tyler, the Creator in Detroit

On queer hip hop artist Tyler, the Creator's late October release, "Chromokopia," the artist takes a vulnerable self-reflective stance as he contemplates middle age. "I'm not the guy I was at 20," he recently told Rolling Stone. "People are getting older, folks having kids and families." The "Chromokopia" tour, featuring special guests Lil Yachty and Paris Texas, will stop in Detroit July 3, 2025 — tickets are available now.



Tyler, the Creator. Photo: chromakopiatour.com

Your Voice Matters

A comprehensive guide to voting rights and resources for LGBTQ+ individuals

BY LIAM CLYMER

As we head into the final days of election season and excitement builds, it's easy to lose focus on all that's at stake for LGBTQ+ voters. No matter your personal beliefs, exercising your right and making queer voices heard is key — especially in a swing state like Michigan. BTL has all the details you need to make a plan for yourself and to encourage others to get out to vote.

What's on my ballot?

The first step in any voting plan is getting to know what's on your ballot. This can feel intimidating even for the most informed voter, thanks to long, wordy ballot proposals filled with political jargon and campaign ads meant to misdirect. Build confidence in what you're bubbling in with these resources.

1. Vote411.org outlines who you'll see on your ballot in a simple format. The site includes features that allow you to compare the stances of politicians side-by-side.
2. Use the Michigan Voter Information Center website (mvic.sos.state.mi.us/Voter/Index) to check your registration, find polling places and find answers to common election questions. If you're feeling lost, this is a great place to start.
3. Do some internet sleuthing — checking out a candidate's page or social media can often be a good indicator of their approach. Even if policy positions aren't blatantly stated, look at word choice. For instance, if someone is talking about "law and order," I'd bet good money on where their viewpoint lies.
4. For further information, endorsements can be helpful. If someone is in good favor with LGBTQ+ advocacy organization Equality Michigan Action Network (see EM's list of candidate endorsements at equalitymiaction.org/2024-endorsements) or is said to prioritize education by the Michigan Education Association (MEA), it can provide credibility to important issues — look into the organizations you trust and their suggestions.
    - Don't be fooled by non-partisan positions! As we all know far too well following the overturning of Roe v. Wade, the opinions of judges placed in positions of power can have tangible, day-to-day impacts. Look at endorsements and language.

When and where do I vote?

Now that you know who you're voting for, it's useful to figure out when and where you'll be voting. With other obligations, it's easy to get flustered and let your opportunity to vote slip by, so don't let that happen — set aside a specific time and add it to your schedule.

1. Vote early! For the Nov. 5 general election, communities are required to provide early voting opportunities from Oct. 26 through Nov. 3 statewide. However, committees are allowed to provide voting for additional days and extended hours if they so choose. The best way to find exact information on what early voting in your area looks like is to visit mvic.sos.state.mi.us and select "Your Voter Information."
2. All registered voters in Michigan have the choice to send in an application for an absentee ballot through 5 p.m. on Nov. 1. Ideally, absentee voters should send in an application 15 days before elections to ensure that their request will be processed in time, so if you pick this option at this late stage, be diligent about returning your ballot quickly.
3. Absentee ballots can be returned to dropboxes or mailed but must be received at the local clerk's office at 8 p.m. on Election Day to be counted. Some states will still count ballots as long as they're postmarked by Election Day — Michigan is not one of them. To ensure your vote is counted, USPS suggests mailing it at least one week before Election Day.
4. If you're going in-person, you can vote in your designated polling place from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. As long as you're in line by 8 p.m., you have the right to vote. For more information on your specific polling place go to mvic.sos.state.mi.us.

Know your voting rights

Obstruction of voting rights doesn't just come in the form of a violent insurrection. Even on local levels, harassment and intimidation can be used to obstruct your right to vote. Know your rights, so whenever and however you choose to vote, you can do so with confidence.

You have the right to…

1. Vote (in-person, early or absentee)
    - Even if you're a student, don't have stable housing, are in a psychiatric hospital, were recently in jail or are in jail now (so long as you're not currently serving a sentence)
2. Receive assistance when voting
    - In many scenarios you can have a registered friend or family member assist in the voting process
3. You can apply for an accessible absentee ballot, allowing you to vote utilizing electronic devices and assistive technology.
4. In select areas you can get a ballot in Spanish, Bengali or Arabic.
5. At any polling location you have the right to get assistance from poll workers
    - Getting to the voting booth.
    - Reading or marking your ballot.
    - Using the voting equipment.
6. Vote without being harassed or intimidated
7. For detailed information on voting rights go to michiganvoting.org/know-your-voting-rights.

Jay Kaplan, the ACLU of Michigan's LGBTQ+ project staff attorney, said that with all that's on the line this election, the LGBTQ+ community must use its right to make its voice heard.

"I just feel so strongly that our vote is our voice, it's our power, it's our chance to be seen and heard," Kaplan told BTL. "I understand that even members of our own community sometimes feel like, 'well, what does the government do for me?' or 'why should I even bother participating?' — I don't think you're ever going to get everything that you want and you're certainly going to be disappointed by the government, but the choice is so stark this year with regards to the future of LGBTQ+ rights and whether we move forward."

Kaplan noted that many recent politicians have attempted to make voting more difficult, while local organizations such as the Michigan Republican Party are already holding training for election challenges. He said it was all the more reason to not pass up this opportunity.

"For people to sit out on that [voting], to me, it just seems incredibly irresponsible," he said.

Don't let these extremist groups keep you from voting. If challenged, ask to be sworn in by a poll worker, answer the questions necessary to establish your eligibility to vote and then vote. If harassment or intimidation is being used to roadblock you from voting, let a

poll worker know immediately. If the poll worker is the individual causing the issue, call your city or township clerk. And if all else fails, call the nonpartisan Election Protection Hotline at 866-OUR-VOTE.

Make a plan — and make it a social event

Michigan State University Student Alex Guo, 19, said that fellow young and LGBTQ+ voters should be excited for this election because it's a chance to have a fresh start. "We have a chance to have a new leadership and to start new again," they said. "It's sort of repeating what I think the feeling was in 2022 and 2020, which was there are a whole range of issues again that really matter to us as young people that really incentivize us to vote this year."

Guo said the energy is palpable on MSU's campus. For the debates, both the MSU Democrats and Republicans held on-campus watch parties. Guo noted that the MSU dems had a huge turnout with a packed room. A good way to build enthusiasm for the upcoming election is to plan events with friends and family. Party To The Polls (whenweallvote.org) will host celebrations at various Michigan polling places to encourage voters to come out and make their voices heard. The events will feature live musicians, such as Cordae, and free food, dancing and art to commemorate the occasion — an occasion that could have a significant impact on the LGBTQ+ community. Don't miss parties in Detroit Ann Arbor (Oct. 30) and East Lansing (Nov. 5).

"[I'd like to] really emphasize to people how important this election is for LGBTQ+ individuals," Guo said. "There are so many factors at stake right now, especially with anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. One of the things I've been trying to highlight so much recently is, because I know not a lot of people have heard about this, the Trevor Project recently conducted a historic first-of-its-kind study where they saw that there was a 72% spike in attempted suicide among LGBTQ+ youth in states that passed anti-LGBTQ+ or anti-trans legislation, compared to just an average of 7% in states that didn't have legislation in place, which is significant."

"I think it just shows where we're at right now if this election goes a certain way," they added. "If we vote [for] individuals who are anti-LGBTQ+, who will promote and support bills of that nature, it is detrimental for the future of LGBTQ+ Americans."

COMMUNITY VOICES: LGBTQ+ LEADERS WEIGH IN

Protect Michigan's Pro-LGBTQ+ Legislature This November

BY REP. LAURIE POHUTSKY

In 2022, Michigan elected its first Democratic trifecta in 40 years when it secured Democratic majorities in the State House and Senate and retained our Democratic governor. We also elected the largest legislative LGBTQ+ Caucus in history, with seven out members.

This trifecta allowed us to expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to secure explicit protections for the LGBTQ+ community, ban the practice of conversion therapy on minors, ban the LGBTQ+ panic defense and secure funding for LGBTQ+ health centers. While many other states are playing defense against or even passing laws that actively harm our community, Michigan stands as a leader in LGBTQ+ protections. It's worth noting, however, that these policies have been years or even decades in the making and only finally made it past the finish line because of a willing Legislature and governor.

That trifecta is on the line with this year's election, where the Michigan House is on the ballot.

> *"The stakes are the highest they've ever been, no matter how low the office is on the ballot."*

Presidential election years can be exhausting for all of us. The fatigue of constant election ads compounded with the existential dread at the possibility that a candidate who does not think our community is deserving of basic rights, much less necessary protections, could be elected to the presidency can make anyone want to tune out. And that fatigue gets even worse the lower down the ballot a race is.

The simple fact of the matter is that most people don't know who their state representative is, much less whether or not they support LGBTQ+ rights. However, that state representative is far more likely to impact your day-to-day life than the president and these elections must be treated with just as much gravity as the presidential election.

I want to be perfectly clear: It is imperative that we elect Kamala Harris as president this November; but it is just as imperative that the Michigan House retain its Democratic and pro-LGBTQ+ majority.

If the House falls under Republican control, all forward progress will halt. It would also set us up for a potential decline in LGBTQ+ rights in future elections. The successes that our community have so recently achieved can just as easily be stripped away, once again.

It was only two years ago when I myself was gaveled down on the floor for referring to myself as bisexual during a floor speech. Just two years have elapsed between the censoring of queer legislators and the passage of landmark LGBTQ+ policy. A Republican majority would ensure not only that Michigan's policies do not allow it to be the welcoming state we know it to be but also that the state's out, queer legislators are silenced from publicly advocating for their community.

I was first elected in 2018, and during that election and every one since, I have told voters that each election is the most important one of our lifetimes. That isn't a lie or hyperbole; it is simply more true with each successive election. This year's is no different. The stakes are the highest they've ever been, no matter how low the office is on the ballot. So while we are rightfully focused on not going back and electing Vice President Harris, let's also make sure we don't go back in Michigan and retain our Democratic State House.

Michigan State Rep. Laurie Pohutsky serves as Speaker Pro Tempore of the Michigan House of Representatives and represents Michigan's 17th House district.

‘brat summer’ turns to election fall

If energy and excitement were on the ballot, young voters would have already won

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

A presidential campaign using Charli XCX and Chappell Roan to appeal to young voters might not have been on your 2024 bingo card. But then again, Vice President Kamala Harris becoming the democratic nominee might not have been, either.

With this year’s election feeling eerily similar to 2020 — even down to the same ticket up until a couple of months ago — many voters have felt fatigued and uninspired by the future. But in July, there was a palpable energy shift when President Biden ended his re-election bid and publicly endorsed Vice President Harris.

“Anyone can see the excitement that wasn’t present before with a 2020 repeat. People are hopeful for something new,” Kylie Spagnuolo, 23, tells BTL.

Between Kamala HQ’s viral TikTok referring to her presidential run as a “femininomenon,” Charli declaring that “kamala IS brat” on X and Taylor Swift endorsing the Harris-Walz campaign on behalf of “childless cat ladies” everywhere, the democratic ticket has used its fair share of trends, pop culture references and endorsements to show up everywhere and appeal to everyone — particularly to young voters.

It makes sense. Nearly 41 million members of Gen Z will be eligible to vote this year, including over eight million newly eligible voters since the 2022 midterm election, according to Tufts. Almost half are people of color, and about 30% identify as LGBTQ+.

Statista reports that Gen Z and millennial voters will make up 48.5% of eligible voters this year.

Spagnuolo says she sees their campaign strategy of connecting with young voters working, for the most part. She admits she would like to see more from the Harris-Walz campaign regarding immigration and a shift in their narrative about the war on Gaza.

“I see both candidates utilizing pop culture stars to encourage voting registration and support, which I think can be great for encouraging active civic engagement,” she says. “What I do see as a huge difference [from the 2020 election] is the influx of Gen Z voters that are acutely interested in voting and politics and their voice becoming increasingly louder — it’s hard to ignore. Social media use for political leverage is increasing daily and it’s effective.”

Appealing to young voters isn’t a new campaign strategy: In 2008, Barack Obama’s campaign also centered much of its focus on young voters, and 66% of voters under 30 voted in his favor.

Social media and content strategy have grown astronomically since 2008, though. Back then, Twitter was still fresh, and Instagram and TikTok didn’t even exist. Not only is information more accessible to people today thanks to social media, but so is voting.

“Voting has never been more accessible in the state of Michigan as it is now,” says Jay Kaplan, a staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan’s LGBTQ+ Rights Project.

> *“I think a lot of young people now are saying, ‘What is my future?’”*
>
> — Jay Kaplan, ACLU Michigan

Michiganders are able to vote early using an absentee ballot, which you can register for online, via mail or in person at your local city or township clerk’s office. You can request an absentee ballot in person at your clerk’s office anytime up to 4 p.m. on the day prior to the election, or Monday, Nov. 4. Michigan voters are also able to cast their votes early in-person at an early voting site. Those locations can be found here.

Because of this, young voters who are attending college out of town can still ensure their votes are counted and don’t have to stress about finding the time to go home amid their busy schedules. Without having to travel, the lack of transportation to a voting precinct is also an issue of the past.

This election season, celebrities and brands are talking about voter registration more than previous years. Snapchat, whose majority of users are 18-24, partnered with Vote.org on a voter engagement tool ahead of the election. Headcount is giving away concert tickets and signed artist memorabilia for those who register to vote and check their registration status.

In an Instagram post, Taylor Swift shared that she made a voting plan and urged others

See **brat summer**, page 32

The Power of Participation: Mobilizing Michigan's LGBTQ+ Community Aged 45 and Up for the Upcoming Election

BY ANGELA GABRIDGE

As we approach the upcoming election, it is crucial to remember that the voices and experiences of our aging LGBTQ+ community matter now more than ever. In a political landscape that often overlooks older adult communities, it is imperative that we mobilize, educate ourselves and participate actively in the democratic process.

Michigan has a rich history of advocacy and activism within the LGBTQ+ community, yet we cannot afford to take our rights and representation for granted. Older LGBTQ+ adults have faced unique challenges throughout their lives — challenges that have shaped their perspectives and experiences. It is these very perspectives that are vital to shaping policies and initiatives that ensure our community's needs are addressed.

Voting is not just a right; it is a responsibility. Every election presents an opportunity to influence the trajectory of our society. By participating, we ensure that issues pertinent to older LGBTQ+ individuals, such as healthcare access, social security, housing stability and enforcement of an amended Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act that includes sexual orientation and gender identity for the first time, remain at the forefront of political agendas. When we make our voices heard, we send a clear message that our community will not be sidelined or ignored.

It's important to recognize that many in our community may feel disillusioned or disconnected from the political process. Some may believe that their vote doesn't matter or that their concerns are not represented. However, history tells a different story.

Here in Michigan, we have witnessed the power of collective action. The changes we've achieved — such as the legalization of same-sex marriage and the enhancement of protections against discrimination — were not mere coincidences; they were the result of persistent advocacy, voting and community engagement.

To those of us aged 45 and up, let's remember that our voices carry weight. We have the experience and wisdom that can guide younger generations in understanding the importance of civic involvement. We need to lead by example, encouraging others to join us in becoming informed about candidates and issues. We must engage in discussions about how our votes can impact our lives and the lives of those we love.

Wondering who the equality candidates are this election season? I encourage you to check out the list of candidate endorsements provided by Equality Michigan Action Network before heading to the polls. Their easy-to-use guide makes it simple to look up candidates from your local races all the way up to federal candidates to see how they weigh in on issues related to LGBTQ+ equality.

In Michigan, we have seen firsthand how activism can lead to change. But this change requires all of us to step up. Our community's strength lies in our unity. When we come together, we amplify our voices and create a formidable force for change. Need help developing a plan to vote or getting to your polling location? Give us a call at 313-241-8994 — for LGBTQ+ folks ages 45 and up, MiGen may be able to help. Now get out there and make them listen!

Angela Gabridge is the executive director of MiGen, Michigan's LGBTQ+ Elders Network. Learn more at migenconnect.org.

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7 Times Vice President Candidate Tim Walz Has Stood Up for the Queer Community

From banning conversion therapy to signing Minnesota's Trans Refuge Bill, Walz has been an impactful ally

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Time and again, Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Gov. Tim Walz has unabashedly supported the LGBTQ+ community in Minnesota, proving that it's more than lip service for this longtime public servant.

Michigan LGBTQ+ leaders and allies like Gov. Gretchen Whitmer voiced their support this summer after Harris picked Walz as her running mate. Whitmer posted to X, "I'm so excited that my friend @Tim_Walz will be the next Vice President of the United States! As a fellow Midwesterner and governor, I know firsthand that his leadership is an important asset to this ticket. He'll be an excellent partner for @KamalaHarris, and I'll do everything I can to get them elected this November. Let's go win this thing!

The 60-year-old governor is a former U.S. Army non-commissioned officer and retired teacher who has served as governor of fellow Blue Wall state, Minnesota, since 2019. Prior to his time in the governor's mansion, Walz served for 12 years as a U.S. Congressman in Minnesota's 1st district.

Born in Nebraska, Walz has an American heartland background that includes time spent with the Army National Guard and as a teacher and football coach in Minnesota starting in the '90s. He's known for a folksy, plain-spoken demeanor and for reaching across the aisle to work with conservatives. Over the summer, Walz earned a badge of honor by starting the "weird" trend when it comes to describing the frequently odd behaviors and talking points of JD Vance and former President Trump.

How has Tim Walz advocated and protected the LGBTQ+ community?

1. Walz restricted conversion therapy for minors in Minnesota.

In July 2021, the governor signed an executive order banning conversion therapy for minors. Minnesota was one of the first states to implement a ban like this through executive action. The order requires the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the state's Department of Commerce to "request attestations from health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and health plan companies that they do not cover conversion therapy," and will implement any rules within their powers to "restrict [financial] coverage of conversion therapy." Since then, DHS no longer pays for conversion therapy through Medicaid and the state can actively investigate and pursue civil enforcement actions against conversion therapy providers.

2. Walz supported reforms protecting LGBTQ+ youth living in foster care.

Walz went on record in support of a federal rule established by the Biden administration late last year that requires child welfare agencies to place LGBTQ+ children in "environments free of hostility, mistreatment, or abuse" based on the child's sexual orientation, gender identity or expression." The rule requires caregivers to undergo cultural competency training to ensure these youth are placed in homes where their identities are affirmed.

3. Walz has appointed many LGBTQ+ people to his administration.

In addition to filling several key administration roles with LGBTQ+ community members, Walz has been vocally supportive of the state's Council on LGBTQIA2S+ Minnesotans, established by the state legislature in 2023. "The Council on LGBTQIA2S+ Minnesotans works to implement economic, social, legal, and political equality for Minnesota's community of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender expansive, queer, intersex, asexual, or two-spirit," according to the group's description on the Minnesota Secretary of State website. The governor appointed the first 12 members of the Council earlier this year.

4. As a teacher, Walz helped establish his school's first Gay-Straight Alliance.

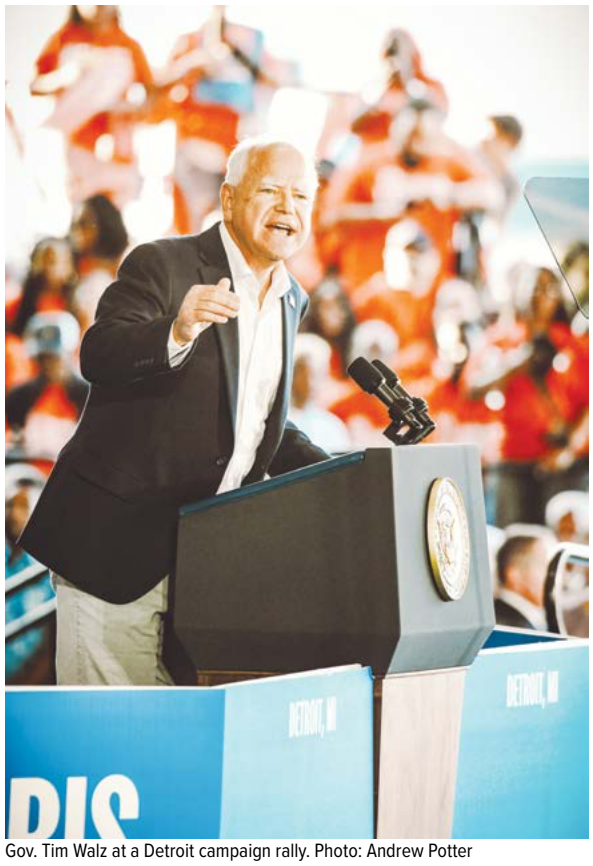
As a 35-year-old social studies teacher in Mankato, Minnesota in the late '90s, Walz served as the first advisor to Mankato West High School's gay-straight alliance (GSA).

5. Walz was an early, staunch supporter of legalizing same-sex marriage.

In 2006, Walz won his election to the U.S. Congress against a conservative Republican while running on a platform that included support for same-sex marriage, banned in Minnesota in 1997. "It wasn't a popular position at the time for a red-district Democrat. It didn't score him any political points. But he stood up for families like mine because he believed it was the right thing to do," out lesbian Angie Craig, a U.S. congresswoman from Minnesota, wrote on X while endorsing Walz for vice president. "His bravery made a difference in my life and the lives of thousands of Minnesotans — and it's a bravery that would make our country better."

6. Walz has made Minnesota a trans refuge.

Minnesota stands as a leader among trans-supportive states and as a beacon of hope for trans individuals and their families who relocate there. In 2023, Walz signed the Trans Refuge Bill, sponsored by out transgender Rep. Leigh Finke. The law "prohibits the enforcement of a court order for the removal of a child or enforcement of another state's law being applied in a pending children protection action in Minnesota when the law of another state allows the child to be removed from parents or guardians for receiving medically necessary health care or mental health care that respects the gender identity of the patient."


Gov. Tim Walz at a Detroit campaign rally. Photo: Andrew Potter

"In Minnesota, we're protecting rights, not taking them away," Walz posted to X, adding in another post he was "proud to sign it into law."

"From the moment I was sworn in as a member of the Minnesota Legislature, it became clear to me that Governor Walz was committed to being a true ally for the queer community. In the past two years, Governor Walz has signed Minnesota's historic Trans Refuge Legislation, a law banning conversion therapy, historic levels of funding for HIV prevention and treatment, created a statewide LGBTQ+ Council, and so much more. Governor Walz has always showed up for our community," Finke said in a statement on Aug. 6. "This year, the choice couldn't be clearer for our community. We have an opportunity to elect a transformational, historic figure in Kamala Harris, one of the greatest public champions for queer people in Governor Walz, or we risk being erased from legal protections by Donald Trump and his allies. Every queer person in the country should be activated and engaged between now and November."

7. Walz, a former U.S. service member, fought to repeal 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'

As a Congressman, the 24-year veteran of the Army National Guard fought to end the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, which prohibited LGBTQ+ community members from serving openly in the U.S. Armed Forces. He also vocally supported the landmark Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, passed in 2009. The Act expanded prior federal hate crimes and legislation to include protections for violent acts based on actual or perceived gender, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity.

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Our Progress Is at Stake: Harris-Walz and Pro-Equality Democrats Are the Only Choice for LGBTQ+ Americans

BY REP. JASON MORGAN

This November, everything is at stake — our rights, our safety and our freedom to be who we are and love who we love. We face a stark choice as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Every election, we're told that it's "the most important election of our lifetimes." This year, the future of everything is on the line in a way we've not seen before.

It truly is the most important election of our lifetimes.

We can choose Donald Trump, who has continually shown hostility to our community through hate and harassment, or we can choose Kamala Harris and Tim Walz, who believe that everyone should be treated with respect and be able to live with authenticity, not fear.

I am all too familiar with the hate that many in our community are facing. You only have to look at the way they speak about us and their constant attempts to rip away our freedom to simply exist — in classrooms, at nightclubs and at work. But as an openly gay elected official in Michigan, I've witnessed the battles we've fought — and won — in making our state a more inclusive and just place for all our people. We've come a long way in the last few years, but make no mistake: This is only the result of electing pro-equality Democrats up and down the ballot.

Last year, we amended the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to explicitly ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It was long overdue. No one in Michigan should lose their job, be denied housing or face harassment because of who they love or how they identify. Just as crucial, we banned the harmful, outdated and bigoted "gay panic" defense. For too long, our very existence was weaponized against us. No longer can someone claim they were provoked to violence simply because they encountered an LGBTQ+ person. These are not just legal reforms; they are moral victories that affirm our dignity and humanity.

A majority of Republicans voted against LGBTQ+ protections in our civil rights bill in Michigan, but all pro-progress Democrats you elected listened to our needs, fought for our rights and put people first. This isn't just political rhetoric — it's real action, making our lives better in tangible ways.

But let's be clear: Progress is fragile. In Trump's first term, he banned transgender Americans from serving in our military, gutted protections for LGBTQ+ healthcare and appointed extreme judges who oppose same-sex marriage. If re-elected, Trump and his allies will implement their Project 2025 agenda by punishing doctors who treat transgender youth and repealing the Affordable Care Act, which helps the LGBTQ+ community access the care they need without discrimination.

By contrast, President Biden and Vice President Harris signed the Defense of Marriage Act to protect same-sex couples, signed an executive order to ensure transgender Americans can serve their country, supported LGBTQ+ youth facing mental health crises and homelessness, and strengthened the Affordable Care Act.

In Michigan, Democrats have proven that we can create lasting change and are on the right track. But we're not done yet. There's still more work to do, more people to uplift and more wrongs to right. As you prepare to vote, remember what's at stake.

This election isn't just about one candidate — it's about the future of our state and country. The stakes are high, and make no mistake, the reasons for fear are real. But we are not powerless. Every single vote is a voice. Our country needs YOUR voice. LGBTQ+ Americans need you to support Kamala Harris and Tim Walz.

State Rep. Jason Morgan is serving his first term representing the 23rd House District. Over the last 15 years, Rep. Morgan has worked in various leadership positions in Michigan and Washington, D.C., including serving for six years as a Washtenaw County commissioner and was elected as the county's first-ever LGBTQ-identified person to serve as chair of the Board of Commissioners. His passions include addressing economic and social inequality, LGBTQ+ rights, transportation and infrastructure, access to quality public education and protecting the health of our environment.

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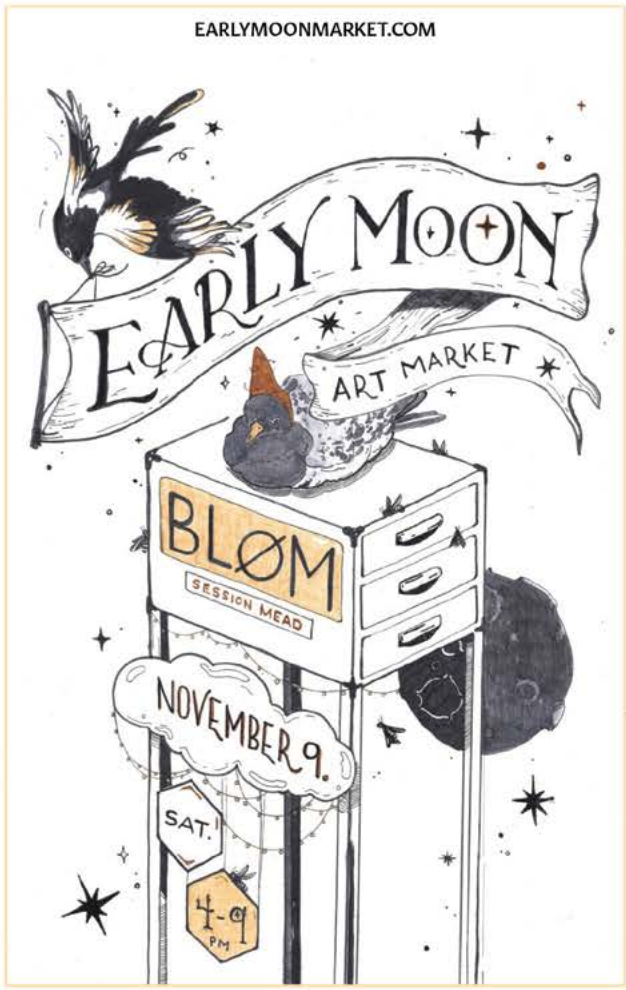

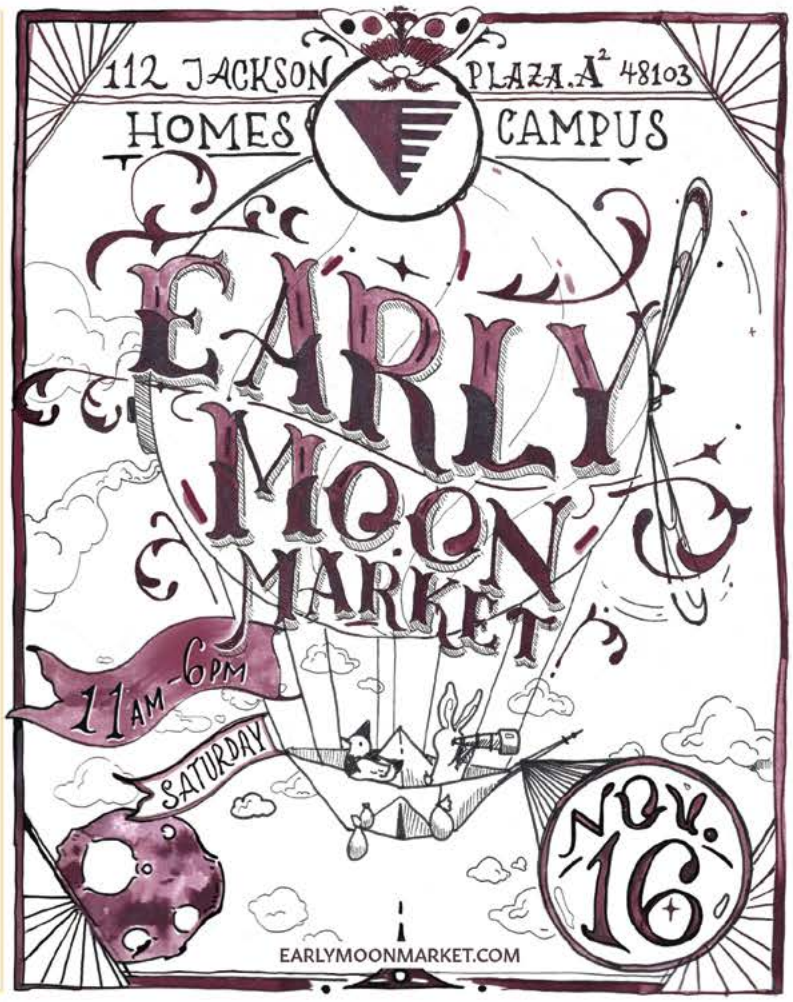

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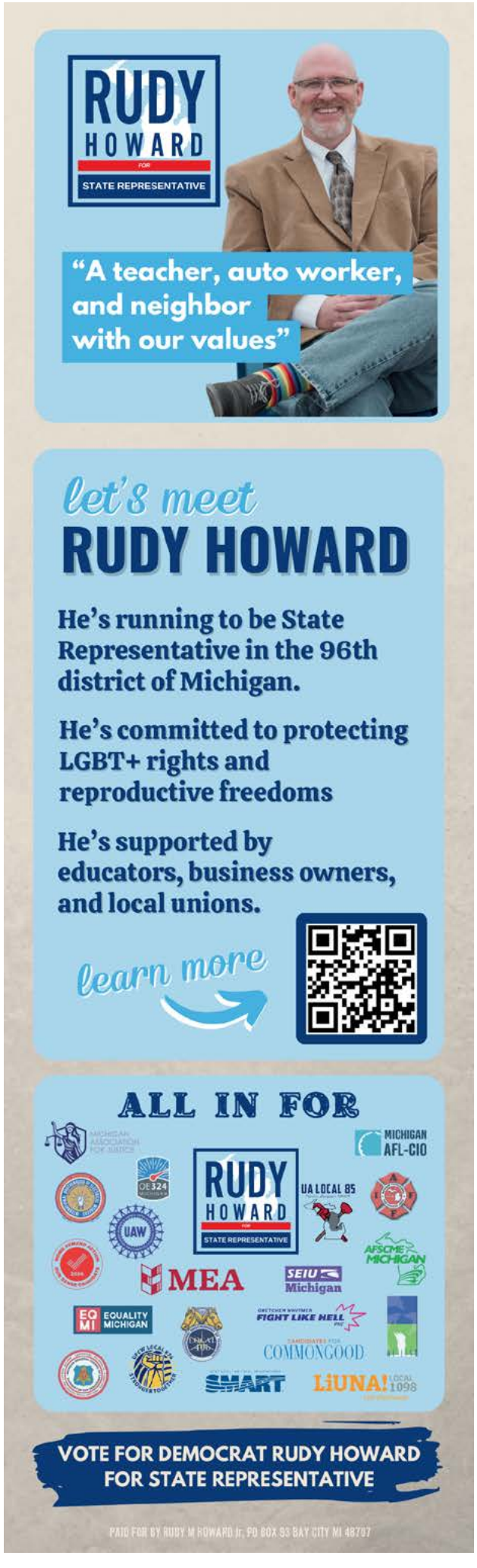


COMMUNITY VOICES: LGBTQ+ LEADERS WEIGH IN

The Importance of Supporting Black LGBTQ+ Voters

BY LUCIUS D. MILES

As the election cycle is coming to a quick close, it is crucial for voters of the entire LGBTQ+ community to acknowledge the unique position of Black members of the LGBTQ+ community within the political landscape, especially Black transgender, nonbinary fem-presenting and masculine-presenting lesbians.

These individuals are often at the intersection of systemic racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. Their representation and safety are critical in electoral outcomes, making their votes and the votes of their allies a powerful mechanism for truly protecting the most vulnerable within our community. Ensuring that Black LGBTQ+ voters are supported and their voices are heard is essential not only for their personal safety but also for protecting the broader community from adverse legislative and judicial decisions.

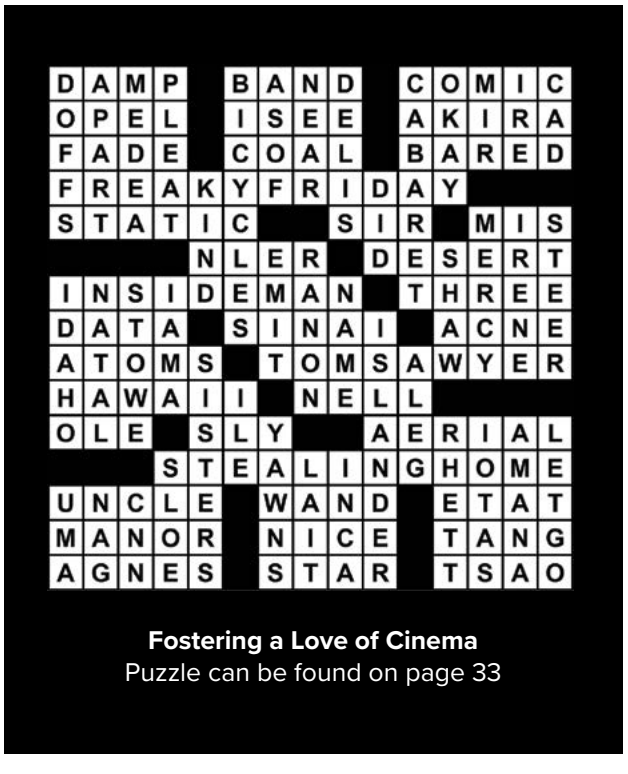
The U.S. Supreme Court, state legislatures and even local elected officials wield considerable power over the everyday lives of marginalized

communities. Policies that target gender identity, reproductive rights and anti-discrimination protections are often decided by a small number of votes, underscoring the significance of every ballot cast. For Black trans and nonbinary individuals, the stakes are particularly high. Laws restricting gender-affirming care, bathroom access and the ability to safely participate in public life are being proposed and enacted at an alarming rate. This environment of hostility is compounded by acts of violence and discrimination, which these communities face at higher rates than any other demographic.

Black transgender women, in particular, are disproportionately impacted by both state and federal policy shifts. This demographic has one of the highest rates of violent victimization, according to numerous studies. The Human Rights Campaign has tracked record levels of fatal violence against trans and nonbinary people, most of whom are Black women. Elected officials who promote or support anti-trans legislation exacerbate this already dire situation, further marginalizing Black trans and nonbinary Americans. This makes voting a matter of life or death for many, as the wrong representation can directly impact safety and access to vital resources.

While federal elections receive significant attention, it is often state

See **Lucius Miles**, page 32



Fostering a Love of Cinema
Puzzle can be found on page 33

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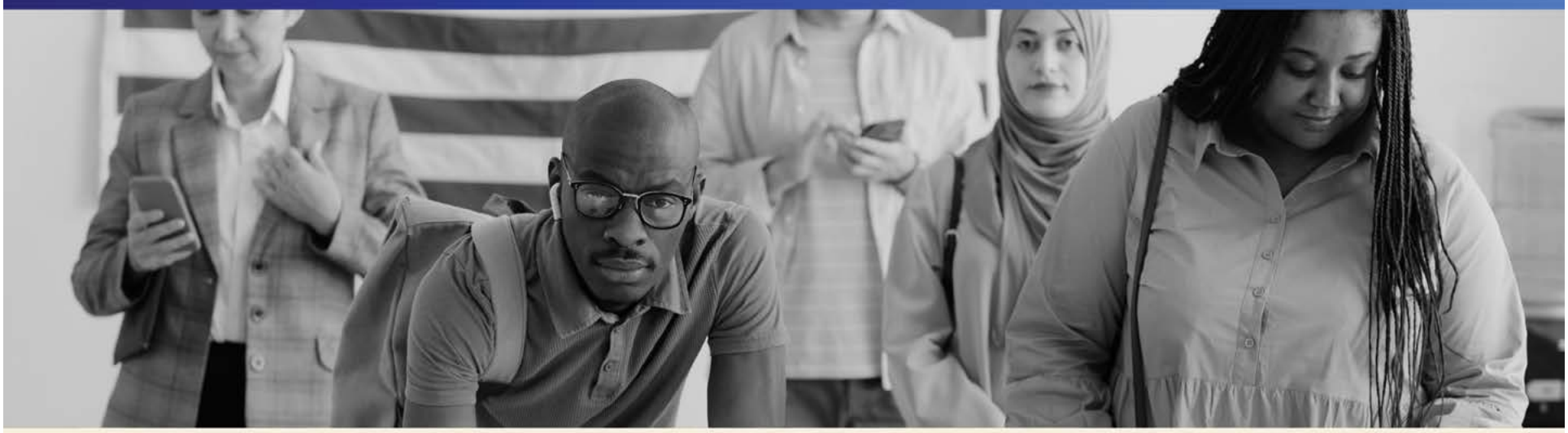

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Sex Work Is Election Work

The $5 billion industry politicians avoid

BY ROHAN ZHOU-LEE

Sex workers have played critical roles in politics throughout history, even beyond headline-grabbing stories involving former president and current convict Donald Trump.

From facilitating voter registration to engaging politics via content creation, the sex worker industry, which generates upwards of $5 billion a year, has had a major influence on U.S. constituents.

Regardless of that influence — and how in-demand sex work is — sex workers consistently find themselves shut out of policymaking and bombarded by archaic policy on federal, state and local levels, especially in Michigan. Yet, despite being bullied and excluded during such turbulent political times, sex workers continue to advocate not just for their rights but also the rights of others through voter empowerment.

Bipartisan bills did more harm than good

In 2020, Donald Trump signed into law the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking and Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (FOSTA-SESTA). This bill intended to combat sex trafficking by removing online platforms like Backpage, which many sex workers used to screen clients for safety. It also pressured search engines and social media platforms to censor content. The law, sponsored by then-senator Kamala Harris,

jeopardized the livelihoods of sex workers, according to industry leaders like Meoldie Garcia, co-director of New Moon Network, which advocates for sex workers by channeling critical funds into grassroots networks. .

"FOSTA-SESTA [outlines] destabilizing consequences for all adult industry professionals," Garcia said. "[It] effectively [erased] their ability to advertise or be found online."

Shane Lukas, owner of advocacy-led brand agency A Great Idea, said it was a "killer for a lot of folks," adding, "[It] did a lot of damage."

In Michigan, local sex workers have experienced an elevation in physical danger and higher exposure to STIs. Zee St. James of Answer Detroit, a sex worker justice collective in Michigan, found themselves having to make riskier choices for work rather than using online resources to screen clients. "It's harder to find clients," they said. "I've found myself making the choice to engage in unprotected oral sex for extra money with clients I have seen before, instead of having to find additional clients who could be violent, or undercover cops."

> *"Criminalization is the number one barrier to accessing HIV services. Without resources such as HIV and STI testing, they cannot stay safe and protected against violence, lack of employment and HIV."*
>
> — Zee St. James of Answer Detroit

Michigan state law permits police officers to postulate as clients soliciting services from sex workers and charge them with prostitution. Such procedures might seemingly contradict the Michigan penal code, which defines prostitution as anyone over the age of 16 who solicits, accosts or invites another person to commit prostitution or an immoral act, and also holds anyone liable for aiding, assisting or abetting sex work. Once arrested, many suspects endure rigorous physical examinations without their consent.

"Michigan is one of nine states with mandatory testing for HIV, hepatitis and other STIs when someone is arrested or charged with prostitution-related offenses, before conviction," St. James said. "Criminalization is the number one barrier to accessing HIV services. Without resources such as HIV and STI testing, they cannot stay safe and protected against violence, lack of employment and HIV."

Local policies have also jeopardized the health and safety of the community. Michigan's penal code 750.448 criminalizes sex workers with, depending on the number of convictions, 93 days to a year in prison, with fines ranging from $500 to $2000, or both. Parker Westwood from Answer Detroit named these the "Walking While Trans Laws," as they were used to further target trans community members and anyone connected to them.

"Michigan's anti-sex work law is often used to profile women of color and women of trans experience whether or not they are participating in sex work," Westwood said. "This puts our support networks in jeopardy and makes it legally dangerous to work together for safety. It also makes it dangerous for our loved ones to know what we're doing. This is another example of a law that criminalizes the group that it claims to protect."

The dire impact of FOSTA-SESTA has left for many in the industry a bleak view regarding the upcoming elections, as both major candidates played a particular role

See **Sex Work Is Election Work**, page 29

COMMUNITY VOICES: LGBTQ+ LEADERS WEIGH IN

Why LGBTQ+ Voters Must Get Involved in the 2024 Election

BY JEYNCE POINDEXTER

As an advocate, activist, case manager and political consultant and advisor, I know firsthand the importance of making sure that community members are engaged, encouraged and knowledgeable about the electoral process and active. With the threat of Project 2025 looming, and after living through and under Trump's presidency, watching him remove resources, eliminate departments which are critical to our country's well being, and slicing people's rights and liberties, we must be vigilant.

I do not want to relive the negative impact of Trump's discriminatory actions and policies that dismantle people. Project 2025 outlines plans to dismantle *and* redirect resources critical to people's survival, and it looks to give Trump unchecked political power. We cannot allow a dictator in America! I have pounded the pavement for years to make sure the community is educated and aware of harmful policies and what they can do to combat them.

For years, I have advocated for the community's rights and liberties as humans to be respected first. I worked for years throughout the state of Michigan rendering supportive services to victims of hate crimes of all kinds. I have started all-trans shelters in collaboration with well-established faith ministries. I have been to court as community members have been killed, violated and physically harmed. I have shown up for people in rural areas where Black people are not common but racism is — all in the name of service to community members that needed help, aid and a level of support that isn't afforded to those of us who are considered "others." We need to show up for this election cycle as we did in 2020, and then some. We must continue to elect well-balanced, leveled thinking, caring elected officials who listen and elevate those who they represent. We don't need leaders that use public office to carry out personal vendettas because they can't grapple with the fact that they loss a presidential race.

> *"We don't need a leader whose soul purpose is to divide and split us up while perpetuating hate. The Harris campaign represents neighborly love, bringing folks in, talking through processes and exploring hope. That's what we need as a country."*

Our country is made up of so many beautiful people and nationalities — ethnicities and backgrounds that are different, add culture and awareness to our communities, and encourage love and celebration of our differences. Michigan is full of diverse and immigrant communities that we love, from Chinatown to Mexicantown. Take a ride through Hamtramck or come out to Southfield where we have a large Jewish community. We want to live and thrive together.

We don't need a leader whose soul purpose is to divide and split us up while perpetuating hate. The Harris campaign represents neighborly love, bringing folks in, talking through processes and exploring hope. That's what we need as a country.

Even when we don't agree, we can do so in a respectful manner. I am proudly voting for Kamala Harris, Krya Bolden and Justice Johnson, Rashida Talib, Slotkin, Karen McDonald and others that my values align with. I will also be educating myself on the local offices and who's running for those seats. I encourage you to do so, as well!

Need a ride to the polls? Call or text Trans Sistas of Color at 313-329-0292.

Jeynce Poindexter is a proud transgender woman of color and activist and serves as co-executive director of Trans Sistas of Color Project and as a Ruth Ellis Center case manager, among many other community roles.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Catching Up with Julie R. Enszer, Early BTL Contributor

BY LIAM CLYMER

The "Where Are They Now?" series will get you up-to-date on the lives of LGBTQ+ community advocates who have contributed to Michigan with years of tireless activism before embarking on new chapters, whether in retirement or pursuit of fresh opportunities elsewhere. In this space, we'll trace the paths of these trailblazers as they navigate life beyond the limelight, offering insights into their current endeavors, passions and the legacies they continue to shape. Join us as we celebrate their resilience, achievements and the lasting impact they've left on Michigan's LGBTQ+ community.

An vital Between The Lines contributor during the publication's earliest years, Julie R. Enszer knows the power that words hold in changing perception. Over a career spanning three decades, she's relentlessly taken on new challenges and supported her community through the power of the press.

Enszer is a writer, editor, poet and college professor. But she's also a champion of LGBTQ+ rights and an example of how one can harness their skills for a greater purpose.

How would you describe your connection to BTL?

When MaxZine Weinstein first began publishing Between The Lines in March 1993 from Ann Arbor, Michigan, I was living in Detroit and was excited to read it. I knew that a LGBT newspaper would add so much to our growing local queer community.

At that time, I was working at Affirmations, Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center, building programs to serve gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in southeastern Michigan. A year later, there was a new name on the masthead — Shannon Rhoades. Shannon and I were in the women's studies program at the University of Michigan together and were friends. Shannon became the editor and publisher of Between The Lines in the spring of 1994.

I reached out to Shannon to talk with her about all things queer publishing. We had long conversations about how I could support her in her role as editor and publisher of Between The Lines. I had just bought a house in Corktown and asked Shannon if she wanted to come and live there inexpensively to make the newspaper more financially viable. She did. And so for about a year, I worked with her on Between The Lines: writing stories, brainstorming ideas, supporting her in production and distribution of the paper and bringing in more writers and volunteers. It was grand.

That work — together with Shannon, Tim Retzloff, Carla Gillard, John Burchett and many others — produced some of my fondest memories from Michigan. During the summer of 1995, Shannon realized that the pace and stress of publishing a monthly paper was overwhelming her. She made the decision to sell the newspaper and move on to other work in her life. Around the same time, I became the executive director of Affirmations.

What has your path looked like since moving on from Between The Lines?

My wife (then partner because no marriage) and I left Michigan in early 1997. Over the next decade, I worked at LGBT organizations, including the Gill Foundation and the Human Rights Campaign. I loved nonprofit work, particularly fundraising, and have so many fond memories of these years — election wins and losses, building grassroots power for LGBT people, the emergence of marriage equality and much more.

Still, through it all, I wanted to go to graduate school. By the mid-2000s, my wife and I were living less than a mile from the University of Maryland. I met the poet Stan Plumley who taught there, and he invited me to take a writing workshop with him. That one class led me to enroll in the MFA program at Maryland. I loved it.

While at Maryland, I connected with professors in the women's studies program and decided to continue graduate school and pursue a Ph.D. in women's studies. In my dissertation, I focused on lesbian-feminist publishing researching publishers of periodicals, books and newspapers from the 1970s and 1980s. Work with Shannon on Between The Lines was always on my mind while doing my research.

What are some of your proudest writing-related moments?

My first book of poetry, "Handmade Love," published in 2008, was a real highlight and I remain incredibly grateful to Lawrence Schimel of A Midsummer Night's Press for publishing it, along with two other books of mine.

In 2010, I became the editor and publisher of Sinister Wisdom. At that point in our history, many people asked me why I was giving time and energy to a lesbian publication. "Are lesbian publications still needed?" women would ask me. Or they would speak nostalgically about the work of Sinister Wisdom, then be amazed that it was still publishing and confide, "but I've moved on from that."

While some people had moved on, for me, lesbian literary journals and lesbian publishers like Firebrand Books, Kitchen Table Press and many others defined my politics and offered spaces to learn about a life not organized by heterosexuality and to read the things that I wanted to write. When Fran Day approached me in 2010 about becoming the next editor of Sinister Wisdom, I knew I must do it; I wanted to see Sinister Wisdom continue for new generations of lesbians and queer women writers.

If people wondered why we needed a lesbian literature and art journal for the first five or six years of my work

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◂ Sex Work Is Election Work
Continued from page 27

in the disenfranchisement of sex workers not just in Michigan but also across the country. "Given Kamala Harris' track record on sex workers' rights issues, sex worker organizers are certainly paying attention," Garcia said. "Sex workers are also extremely alarmed by threats posed by Project 2025."

A concept devised by former Trump aides at the right-wing extremist Heritage Foundation, an anti-LGBTQ+ group according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, Project 2025 offers a draconian vision that includes banning online adult entertainment, a channel of revenue through which some sex workers can control who they collaborate with and be free from third-party contracts. The nearly 1,000-page document, publicly rejected by Trump, also proposes imprisoning such content creators nationwide, who sometimes can earn $10,000 per month.

Taking a similarly conservative stance, Harris departed from Biden's 2020 vow to "protect the lives of sex workers." Sex workers' rights were not included in the DNC platform this year. Regardless of who wins the presidential elections, many sex workers predict that the outcome will result in further disenfranchisement. For most, especially in consideration of FOSTA-SESTA, it has already been a reality.

"A lot of the rhetoric I hear from Democrats is: "'Don't criticize Kamala on Gaza or anything else — you don't want Trump to win, do you?'" said St. James. "Some of Project 2025 is happening to sex workers right now. When there is a Democrat in office, people get complacent."

Sex work is election work

Despite being disregarded by both major political parties, sex workers at Answer Detroit are continuing to mobilize to get voters to the polls. Several sex workers are at the front line when it comes to voter registration information and support, like India Johnson, another member of Answer Detroit. "I will give out correct information on how to vote and how to register to vote if you are 18 and older with or without a felony conviction," she said. "Sex work is the vote for change."

Answer Detroit leadership is also keeping tabs of state policies that will impact not just sex workers but the entire community. Several members are calling for elected officials to pass Michigan House Bills 5178 and 5179, currently in circulation, to establish sanitary needle and syringe access programs, which the CDC reports will reduce fentanyl overdoses and the spread of blood-borne infections like viral hepatitis and HIV. In Michigan, unsafe needle usage was responsible for more than 1,100 deaths this year alone, at the date of publication. Nationwide, LGBTQ+ people are twice as likely to engage with fentanyl, especially minors, potentially due to mental health.

"HB 5178 and 5179 would provide protection for individuals working with a syringe exchange to distribute lifesaving public health tools like fentanyl test strips," St. James said. Michigan's ballot will also include local races for state legislature, judges and state supreme court, meaning that the way these bills pass based on elections could directly impact the state's public health and safety.

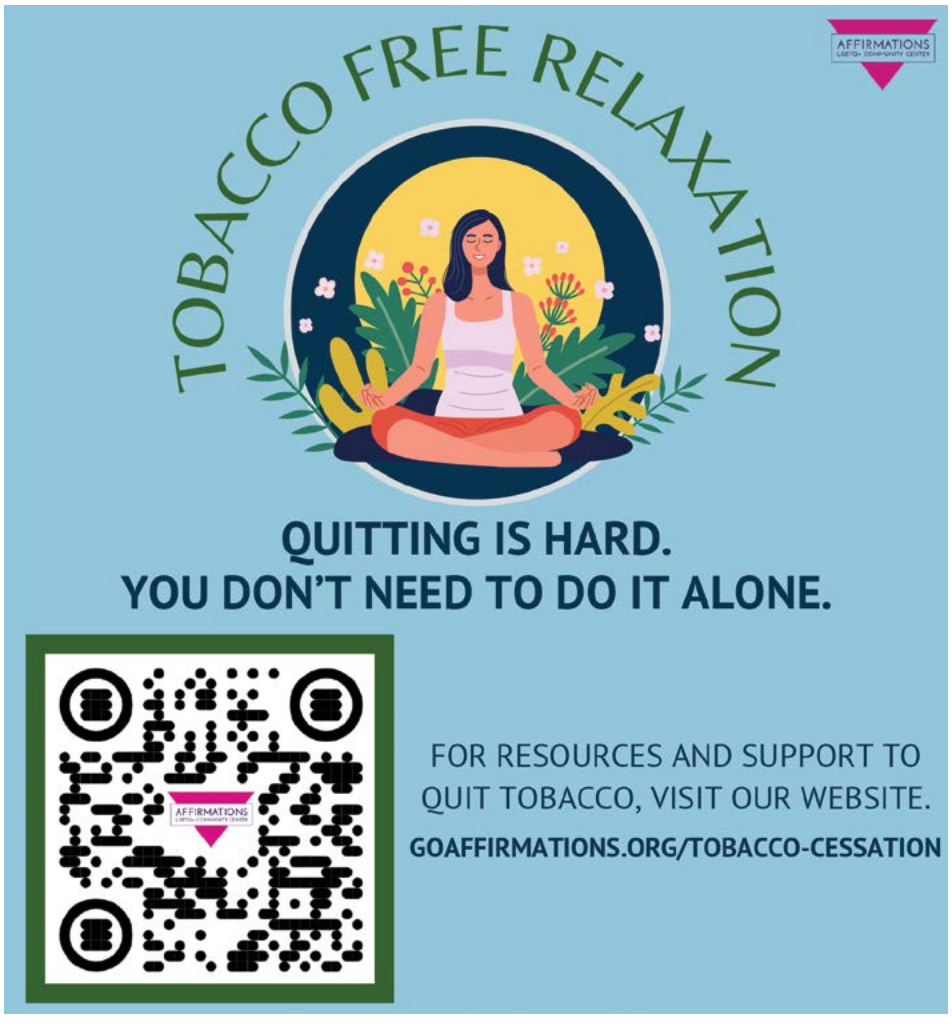
Local elections may also sway the direction of anti-trans bills circulating throughout Michigan, another threat to the trans community, trans sex workers and their loved ones. Constituents can easily access this information at the Michigan Voter Information Center alongside other resources regarding voting.

> *"At the end of the day, we are encouraging people to 'hit the polls like a stripper.'"*
>
> — Zee St. James of Answer Detroit

Across the country, sex workers are mobilizing to get people to the polls, regardless of political affiliation or election results. Many, like Answer Detroit's Jay Theden, have been canvassing to ensure people's access to voting come November. "As a sex worker and trans person, being a canvasser during election seasons is a privilege and a pleasure," he said. "I ensure that the turf I cover includes the LGBT population. I make sure that our voices are heard and our rights are exercised equally."

Members like Westwood will be working the polls on election day to ensure everyone who arrives will be able to exercise their First Amendment rights. "I know many other sex workers that will either be working the polls or canvassing up until the election," they said. "We're out here. You may not even realize that the person handing you your ballot is a sex worker."

"At the end of the day, we are encouraging people to 'hit the polls like a stripper,'" St. James said. "Just go vote. Voting is a privilege that not everyone has had in this country, so don't take it for granted."



Lukas Gage: Behind the 'Smile'

As his career continues to bloom, Gage remains one of Hollywood's most fearless actors

Lukas Gage. Photo: Paramount Pictures

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

On hit shows such as "Euphoria" and "You," Lukas Gage has perfected the art of being captivatingly chaotic. Though experiencing a golden shower during the latter series' fourth season might not have been on the actor's bucket list, it's on brand for his fearless approach to exploring unconventional territory, which has become a hallmark of his ever-ascending career. Admirably, it's one filled with bold detours and exhilarating choices, like an encounter with Murray Bartlett in "The White Lotus," an iconic sex scene that got the internet talking about rimjobs. Then, in the supernatural detective comedy-drama "Dead Boy Detectives," released earlier this year on Netflix, Gage pounced into the role of the Cat King, an unabashedly queer feline-human hybrid.

With his latest film, "Smile 2," Gage dives headfirst into thought-provoking horror with yet another balls-to-the-wall role that manages to turn his handsome, real-life smile into a terrifying grimace, proving that sometimes the most intriguing stories come with a side of deliciously dark humor. Written and directed by Parker Finn, the film offers a twisted take on stardom. It follows pop star Skye Riley (Naomi Scott) as she confronts her past trauma triggered by a series of horrific and gruesome events unfolding around her.

As Lewis Fregoli, Quinn's former classmate and drug dealer, Gage is so terrifying in the film that when we connected on a video call recently, I began by jokingly asking him not to smile ("I'll try not to," he assured, laughing — though he still did, abundantly). During our candid conversation, it became clear that Gage isn't just here to play roles; he's treading these waters with intent, redefining what it means to be compellingly complex in Hollywood.

On a break from filming in the mountains of Spain, Gage spoke about the origins and inspirations behind his daring and nontraditional choices across diverse roles. He also reflected on his fans, who are so enamored that no tweet is too thirsty for them.

Based on the offbeat roles you've taken, when did you realize that committing to the unexpected and the not-so-politically correct was the path you wanted to take as an actor?

I think, honestly, it comes from a deep fear of being boring, and it maybe comes from a deep fear of not getting enough attention when I was younger, so I knew I had to do stuff that was sometimes big and loud. I have empathy for characters that really go to those places and do

some things a lot of people see as unlikable or that maybe are unlikable, and I try to tap into why they are the way they are instead of judging them. But I'm just inspired by interesting, bold performers like Gena Rowlands and Ellen Burstyn, who play characters that are bigger than life, but still grounded.

I imagine you admire Ellen Burstyn in "Requiem for a Dream" then.

I mean, one of the best performances.

When I see you perform, I often think about what it would be like if you collaborated with queer filmmakers like Gregg Araki or John Waters.

Yeah, I would love that. Give me some "Doom." Give me some "Serial Mom." They are definitely on my list of filmmakers that I looked up to and I am just in awe of when I would watch their films. Harmony Korine was another one growing up that I was just shocked by, and some of the Pasolini Italian films from the '60s that were doing things that were pushing the boundary. And people, when they watched it, were very shocked, and some people were disturbed by it. I admire that bravery in filmmakers.

For "Smile 2," what went into creating a look — both the smile and the eyes — that is effectively horrifying?

I mean, I just watched "Smile" a bunch and I practiced in the mirror. I think a lot of it comes from the stillness. A lot of it comes with taking your time and not rushing any moment in the little micro movements and the little micro eye movements. I worked with this lady named Julia Crockett, who's a movement coach, and she really helped me try new things and get in my body and try different micro movements with my face. That was a new thing that I hadn't really been familiar with, and now it's something that I do in everything I work on.

What qualities do you think make Skye a potential gay icon?

I think her looks, the dance moves, and the pop music itself is very queer and very fun. Her vulnerability and her sadness too. I feel that's why we connect with Lana Del Rey and Miley Cyrus. Their vulnerability and their honesty to talk about things that some pop stars won't is why a lot of people relate to them, and I think Skye Riley does that in a way.

Her relationships with men and women in this film seems to be pretty ambiguous, maybe intentionally so. How do you read her sexuality in this film?

I think it's the same thing with her performances: You can't put them in a box, and I think that Skye Riley as a character, you can't put her in a box. You saw that she had an ex-boyfriend, but she seems like the kind of character who definitely experimented and is open to anything, but she has a complicated relationship with both male and female figures in her life. I mean, [and] complicated mom issues. We don't know anything about where her dad went, why he's not in the picture. We don't know. Her female friends are not great. The way that she treats men is not great. I mean, it's just all very, very, very layered and interesting and not defined.

How do you connect with Skye's experience of dealing with public expectations? And how do you navigate that pressure in relation to your queerness and the ways others try to box you in?

I think I'm still figuring it out, and it's still a thing that's a work in progress. I have a hard time with where the intersection of private and public meets and how much I should share with the world and how much I want to keep to myself because it's sacred to me.

Tina Fey said something recently in an interview about authenticity coming at a price, and authenticity is expensive, and as you gain more success, you're going to want to give less away to the world because that's important to you. I'm doing a bad job of paraphrasing, but it's true. I think that I'm still figuring it out, and I want to be someone that is someone that can be a role model and someone that can be looked up to and someone that I maybe didn't have as a kid, but also I'm not perfect and I'm damaged just like Skye is, and I have my faults and I'm definitely a work in progress, as we all are.

So I feel an immense amount of pressure at times that I should have it all together, but then I remember that I'm a human and I'm going to make mistakes, and that's why we love characters like Skye because she is so cracked and so vulnerable and so raw and so layered and so poised, at times, and then at other times she is just a complete mess. And I think we all are, and I think that's why Naomi's character is resonating with so many people and getting such amazing reviews — it's not just playing this idea of this pop star. I mean, she is really, really doing something amazing with that performance.

There's been talk on social media about how this is, perhaps, your hottest role to date, something I'd like to better understand. One fan wrote on X, "I don't know what's wrong with me, but Lukas Gage in 'Smile 2' is the most attractive I've ever found him." As someone who has become familiar with fan thirst, how do you explain this kind of thirst?

Look, maybe it's kind of like that thing when

See **Lukas Gage**, page 36

brat summer

Continued from page 18

to do so, too. "Your research is all yours to do, and the choice is yours to make," the "I Can Do It With a Broken Heart" singer said. "I also want to say, especially to first time voters: Remember that in order to vote, you have to be registered! I also find it's much easier to vote early. I'll link where to register and find early voting dates and info in my story."

In less than 24 hours after the conclusion of the U.S. Presidential Debate on Sept. 10, more than 337,000 people visited that registration link.

On National Voter Registration Day Sept. 17, Billie Eilish and her brother, Finneas, also took to Instagram, where they shared a video endorsing Harris and pushed fans to vote. In it, the "Birds of a Feather" singer said, "Vote like your life depends on it, because it does."

The siblings said they are voting for Harris and Walz "because they are fighting to protect our reproductive freedom, our planet and our democracy."

Prior to Obama, many nominees didn't focus on issues important to young voters, like global warming, the environment and high college expenses, because it was assumed that young voters wouldn't turn up to the polls.

"I think a lot of young people now are saying, 'What is my future?'" says Kaplan.

Gen Z is worried about getting out of their student debt or ever being able to afford a house of their own, not to mention civil and reproductive rights, says Kaplan. "These things give them a reason to vote, and they've shown up to do so. Back in 2008, they saw [voting] as a way to demonstrate hope and progress and being able to move forward, too."

Clinging to hope is still a critical piece of the election puzzle this year. The Harris-Walz campaign seems to bring something different to the "same old, same old" of years prior.

"People were unhappy with another Trump vs. Biden showdown that left everyone feeling like they lost. [But] people feel like they gained a new opportunity with Harris," says Spagnuolo. Much of that, she says, is thanks to her running mate, Tim Walz.

"He's the embodiment of a 'Midwest Dad' and he's relatable to people — more so than Harris," she says. "At a time where the Midwest vote means everything, I think he got a lot of people on board with this campaign, or at least made them more amicable, including me."

Lucius Miles

Continued from page 24

legislatures and state supreme courts, such as Michigan's, that have the most immediate and direct impact on marginalized groups. Local representatives shape laws that regulate education, healthcare and public safety, often enacting restrictions or protections that can vary widely from one state to another. In Michigan, recent legislative sessions have seen intense debates over LGBTQ+ rights and protections. With a closely divided Michigan State House and a Michigan Supreme Court that has played a critical role in upholding civil rights, voting down the ballot is just as important as voting for federal representatives.

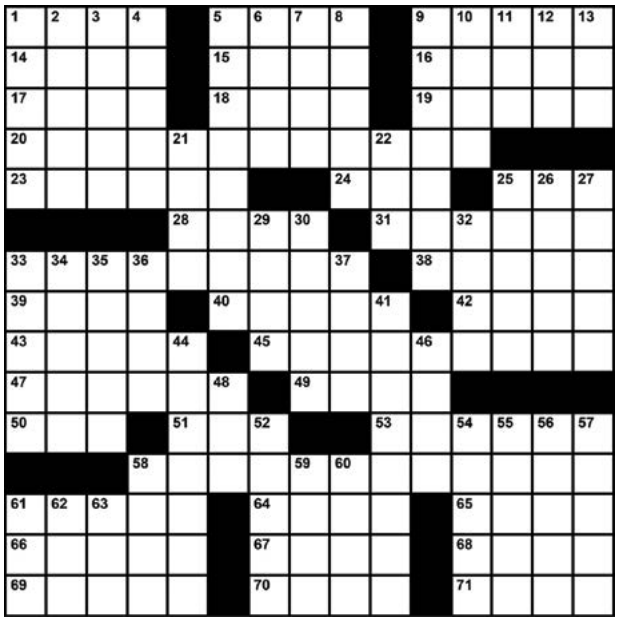
The Michigan Supreme Court, for example, has made landmark decisions impacting LGBTQ+ residents' rights, from housing discrimination cases to affirming representation in the court system. Ensuring that pro-equality candidates are elected to these positions is crucial to safeguarding the legal rights of Black trans and nonbinary Michiganders. Similarly, state house races determine which bills are passed or blocked, including those related to health care access, hate crime enhancements and educational policies that affect LGBTQ+ youth.

Voting is a vital tool for holding power to account, but it is not just about showing up at the polls. Building coalitions that center the voices of the most marginalized, such as Black trans and nonbinary fem-presenting people, is essential for creating lasting change. Their safety is not just a matter of policy; it's a reflection of Michiganders commitment to human rights and dignity. Allies can show solidarity by educating themselves on the candidates' platforms, mobilizing their communities to vote, and pushing for policies that prioritize the safety and well-being of Black LGBTQ+ individuals.

In the upcoming elections, the stakes could not be higher. Black trans and nonbinary fem-presenting Americans deserve to live without fear of targeted violence and discriminatory policies. Protecting their rights means voting for candidates at every level, from the U.S. president to the local school board, who are committed to inclusivity, equity and justice.

When we vote alongside and for the most vulnerable, we ensure a safer, more equitable society for everyone.

Lucius Miles is a dedicated Gun Violence and Communications Coordinator with Progress Michigan. With a background in food service, they shifted to political work in 2016, starting with an independent expenditure for Planned Parenthood for Hillary Clinton, gaining experience across both partisan and nonpartisan initiatives. Lucius is driven by a commitment to social justice, passionately advocating for Black Lives Matter, housing as a human right, food security, access to clean water and zero tolerance for any form of genocide. Their work reflects a deep dedication to equity, community well-being and meaningful systemic change.



Fostering a Love of Cinema

Across

1 Showing excitement
5 t.A.T.u. or R.E.M.
9 Lily Tomlin, for one
14 Robert, who streaked the Oscars
15 Frasier's response to a client
16 "The Seven Samurai" director Kurosawa
17 Change from red to pink
18 Porter's fuel?
19 Like the cheeks of one who streaks
20 Jodie Foster comedy of 1976
23 Back talk, slangily
24 Elton John's title
25 Third notes, to Bernstein
28 Glenn Burke, formerly
31 " ___ Hearts"
33 Foster crime drama of 2006
38 Number of sides to a gay symbol
39 What a computer may spit out
40 Whence Moses went down
42 Troubling spots
43 Small particles
45 Foster adventure musical of 1973
47 Birth state of Bette Midler
49 Title role for Jodie
50 Arena cry, to Frida
51 Cunning
53 Over one's head
58 Foster sports drama of 1988
61 "___ Tom" (Langston Hughes poem)
64 Fairy godmother's stick
65 Colorado, to Cocteau
66 Where Bruce Wayne kept Dick Grayson
67 Easy partner
68 Tart taste
69 Endora portrayer Moore-head
70 One born in a Cukor film
71 Poet ___ Wu

Down

1 Removes, as clothing
2 Like unhappy lovers, maybe
3 Greek sorceress
4 Skirt fold
5 Two-wheelers
6 Starting from
7 Songwriter Holly
8 Where the salami is hidden
9 Minnelli hit of 1972
10 Give consent to carry out
11 To me, to Magnus Hirschfeld
12 Land of O. Wilde
13 Unmannerly man
21 Good-hearted
22 Had sex with, in slang
25 TV series in which Guillermo Diaz played a nurse
26 Cara of "Fame"
27 Beef on the hoof
29 Do a nocturnal activity
30 Was excessive with the mouth
32 Clarinetist Artie
33 "My Own Private ___"
34 Relating to birth
35 Antislavery author
36 "Today ___ man"
37 Dick, for one
41 Mead, while living in Samoa
44 Devout women who don't have sex with men
46 Break it on Broadway
48 Suffix with project
52 Open-mouthed responses
54 "Gone with the Wind" guy
55 The I's of Socrates
56 Kitchen appliance brand
57 "Unhand me!"
58 Gin flavor
59 Renee Vivien's milk
60 Peru native
61 Thurman of "Kill Bill"
62 Albert to Armand, in "The Birdcage"
63 Anderson Cooper's network

See p. 24 for answers

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A Suitcase of Memories: Reflections on Cyndi Lauper's Farewell Concert in Detroit

The gay icon defied time during the chic, heartfelt show

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

I spent 15 years attending the Catholic church (and over 15 years more attending pop concerts), so I can confidently say that pop music shows are a form of congregational worship in their own right. They serve as sermons for the soul, and sometimes when you're a gay kid born in the 1980s, led to believe that God condemns you, you turn to the catharsis of sparkly pop bops from someone like singer and gay icon Cyndi Lauper. I was that kid.

To survive as a closeted gay teen in the 1990s, which I consider the pop era that defined my youth, I latched hard onto music as escape and catharsis. (I consider the 1980s to be the musical era of Me Loving Anything My Mom Played, including Lauper, who rose to fame then.) I needed to fling open those closet doors, which I did in 2001 during the summer after I graduated high school, before I could truly get closer to the history of who Lauper was to so many gay men who allowed me to also live openly as one.

Then I saw Lauper on stage for the first time, opening for none other than Cher. I still can't believe this was all in one night, and seeing Lauper open the show, well, it really just felt like its own main event, as did the giant scabbed-over zit on my face.

My self-esteem was in tatters then; even though I had come out, an acne-speckled face had me feeling like an outsider in a crowd of people with seemingly perfect skin. Hearing Lauper sing "True Colors" that night became a religious experience, and, through tears that I thought would never stop, I would play it ritualistically, but especially before bed in place of "Our Father." It was me, with the sad eyes, in a world full of people, that Cyndi was singing to. And she saw my true colors.

> *"'True Colors' still takes me back to 2002. When she performed it near the end, she stepped into the audience, a gesture of togetherness. A man behind me wept, and I wondered if he was crying because he, too, remembered the first time he heard that song and felt its embrace."*

Appropriately, I was there with my mom, an ally herself. This history sets the stage for what happened last week, again with my mom, now 22 years later, as Cyndi Lauper sang that song again, deepened by time and life experience and my own knowledge of its history (Lauper recorded the song in the 1980s because it reminded her of her friend Gregory Natal, who died of AIDS) and its ever-growing resonance in our community. I consider it now to be a prayer for all of us outsiders. And yet, when she sings it, even still, you are made to feel very much on the inside. The only person in the room.

Though she's playing mostly arenas on this trek, called the Girls Just Wanna Have Fun Farewell Tour, Lauper took the stage at the Fox Theatre on Oct. 24. Detroit, it seemed, got a pre-Halloween treat — a chic, retro-meets-modern show that combined grand-scale production with the intimacy of a theater performance. What a way to say goodbye.

At 71, Lauper has accepted her own mortality. "Well, hon', you know, right now I'm strong, and I can do an arena tour," she told me in June when I asked her about what led to this being her last tour. "And I haven't done it in years, like a real bonafide arena — 'go see Cyndi, it's not 50 minutes, it's a fucking hour and a half,' and you actually can hear a lot of music. Right now, I'm strong and I can do it. But in five years, I don't know what the heck. Sure, I'll probably sing. I'll probably do something because I love singing, but I don't know that I would have the physical strength to do an arena tour. The people that can, God bless them."

And God bless Cyndi Lauper, whose performance defied the passage of time as she gave one hell of a concert. Lauper's liquid voice showcased just how robust it still is on this night, and when it soared to places that sounded like I was seeing her in 2002 all over again, I stood proudly. The truth is, though, if there were a prayer bench, I would've been on my knees. Her underrated cover of the breakup ballad "I'm Gonna Be Strong" resonated with the same emotional intensity it has since she released it as a solo cover in 1994, culminating in soaring notes that, if you didn't know her version, would have you wondering if this is same voice singing "Girls Just Want to Have Fun." "I Drove All Night" challenged that notion too. Though Lauper's career is often defined by catchy bops that showcase only a fraction of her vocal prowess, she is an undeniable powerhouse when she lets it rip.

See **Cyndi Lauper**, page 38

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Lukas Gage in "Smile 2." Photo: Paramount Pictures

‹ Lukas Gage
Continued from page 31

you try too hard, but with anything, the opposite thing happens. I tried my best to not be sexy and to be as messy and unfiltered as possible, and so maybe that's a great note to myself to stop trying too hard because when I try to be hot, it's probably not, and when I try to be a manic, unhinged drug addict, I guess it's sexy.

On the topic of thirsty tweets, you had read some for BuzzFeed a couple of years ago, and one was "Lukas Gage better show me his hole." The internet is obviously not real life. How do your fans express that level of enthusiasm when they meet you?

Well, they definitely don't say that to my face. [Laughs.] I think people can be a lot bolder on the internet and behind a screen than they can to your face, which can be not a great thing at times. But no, I mean, it's funny. It's kind of flattering, I think. Not really. I don't know. It's just insane that people think that, I guess, about me. But everyone in person is very kind, and like yourself, very supportive and says very nice things about the boldness and that the representation has been very cool to see. So that means a lot.

Thanks to you, the LGBTQ+ and kink communities have increased representation when it comes to rimming and golden showers. Is there a motivating factor for you in taking on these roles, knowing that you can contribute to queer culture and influence perceptions of sexuality?

I wish I could tell you that I went in, when I started my career, with that goal, but I honestly can't say that. I can't say it was an intentional thing to do. I wish I could take credit for that, but no.

It kind of just came to me, and maybe it's something about me that people picked up on, or maybe I have a European sensibility about nudity or sexuality. So I think maybe people saw that in me, and then those roles started to come in, but it wasn't an intentional thing. But if it did that and it helped people have an open conversation about sexuality or their kinks or sex positivity, that's amazing. What a plus to do that. But no, I can't say it was an intentional thing to do. I wish I could take credit for that, but no.

How do you hope queer sex will evolve on screen 10 years from now?

Hopefully it won't even be so revolutionary... it will just be. It'll just be so normal and so openly talked about.

I recently revisited "Down Low," and I still can't believe that you said "virgin hole" in front of Audra McDonald.

I can't either. [Laughs.]

But you wrote it.

I did. But I didn't realize that I would be doing it in front of a six-time Tony Award-winning actress! That was just one of those pinch me moments where I can't believe that I was able to convince Audra McDonald, Judith Light, Zachary Quinto and Simon Rex to do this script that I wrote with my best friend on the couch, and writing the most insane, provocative jokes to make each other laugh, and then somehow getting these award-winning actors to agree to do it was... I mean, it was just amazing. And I think it was one of the first times I was not the supporting character, to have a leading role and go toe to toe with these people I've looked up to for such a long time. It was a privilege, and I can't wait to have my next project be made.

Is it in the works? I hope it's as outlandish as "Down Low" was.

It is in the works, yeah. And I promise it will be.

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Where Are They Now

Continued from page 28

as editor, after the 2016 election, the need for Sinister Wisdom was plain. I've now published over 50 issues of the journal and thirteen different Sapphic Classics, our reprint series of classic texts by lesbians and queer women writers. I hope I'll be able to publish another 50 more before I am done.

Winning the Lambda Literary Award for "The Complete Works of Pat Parker," which I edited and Sinister Wisdom published in 2016, was a real highlight and wonderful recognition of my work. I also won a Lambda Literary Award for "OutWrite: The Speeches that Shaped LGBT Literary Culture," which I co-edited with Elena Gross. Both of those awards are deeply meaningful.

One of the great things about writing is being in community with other writers and readers. Recently, some women in Brazil contacted me about translating a poetry collection of mine, "Lilith's Demons," into Portuguese. I am excited about that.

Mostly, I am thrilled to be in the midst of so much amazing work at Sinister Wisdom. A flourishing community of volunteers, readers and supporters surrounds Sinister Wisdom. The journal is growing, doing more and creating more to celebrate and promote lesbian culture. I am working on many amazing books and projects that I am excited to share with the world. I am grateful to everyone who shows up to help make this work happen.

What spurred the creation of "The Pinko Commie Dyke" poetry collection?

"Pinko dyke" and "commie sluts" were phrases on the cover of Heresies #20, a feminist art journal. The phrase "pinko commie dyke" was rolling around in my head when my wife and I were living in Saginaw, Michigan, in the house that I grew up in, for nine months in 2015 and 2016. A series of events caused us to leave Maryland and decamp for Michigan.

Initially, I started writing poems as a part of my origin story, wondering, "How does one born and raised in mid-Michigan become a pinko commie dyke?" As I was writing, I realized that I am part of a powerful tradition of pinko commie dykes, women who are part of a "leftist lesbian cabal," a phrase we used on the cover of the book, to make the world a better place for everyone.

The poems in this collection reflect a collective voice of dyke activism and lesbian resistance. "The Pinko Commie Dyke" is me and so many other lesbians I have known. I am grateful to Tim Retzloff who connected me with Isabel Clare Paul; Isabel worked with Tim on the comic book about the first gay pride in Detroit, and she illustrated "The Pinko Commie Dyke" brilliantly. A few copies are still available — signed from me or from the publisher, Indolent Books.

Where are you now?

My wife, Kim Sherrill, who I met in Detroit when she had a brief stint on the board of Affirmations, and I live outside of Tampa, Florida. I teach fully online at the University of Mississippi. We have a small plot of land amid strawberry fields that we share with two Saint Bernards and a very assertive and feisty cat.

This interview has been condensed and reformatted for publication purposes.

Cyndi Lauper

Continued from page 34

Emotionally, she can still pack a punch. Upon its 1993 release, "Sally's Pigeons" could pierce even the hardest of hearts. Today, it should change the minds of Republican voters who'd rather see women die from medically unsound abortions than have control over their own bodies, and with the fate of safe abortion rights on the 2024 election ticket, her poignant song about the tragic death of a young woman from a back-alley abortion left a few women around me in tears.

"I wanted to have songs that mattered to me," Lauper said, reflecting on her journey from pop star to genre-defying artist, before performing "Who Let in the Rain." Alongside "Sally's Pigeons," she wove several political statements into the night, adding a "Girls Just Want to Have Fun*damental* Rights" rap to the song that perfectly encapsulated that evolutionary sentiment. At the onset, a video montage set the stage for the show, featuring footage of Lauper testifying before a Senate subcommittee about LGBTQ+ youth homelessness in 2015. This montage highlighted scenes from her life and career, showcasing four decades of artistry and LGBTQ+ activism.

Lauper acknowledged her queer fans when she mentioned that Christian Siriano designed some of her wardrobe for this tour. She shared how he helped her achieve a level of glamor not typical for her, noting that if this was indeed going to be her last tour, the LGBTQ+ community would expect nothing less.

Wig or not, "True Colors" still takes me back to 2002. When she performed it near the end, following the ebullient "Shine" — another song that has become an LGBTQ+ anthem — she stepped into the audience, a gesture of togetherness. A man behind me wept, and I wondered if he was crying because he, too, remembered the first time he heard that song and felt its embrace. Our youth behind us, we had survived. No zits! And mom, still by my side.

We were older now, as was Lauper; old enough that we might never experience one of the defining songs of our younger years the same way again. Unbeknownst to us all, that night, if this truly was farewell, we weren't just saying goodbye to Cyndi Lauper, but to so much more than we ever anticipated.

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Dr. Andrew Roberts with a Be Well Medical Center patient.

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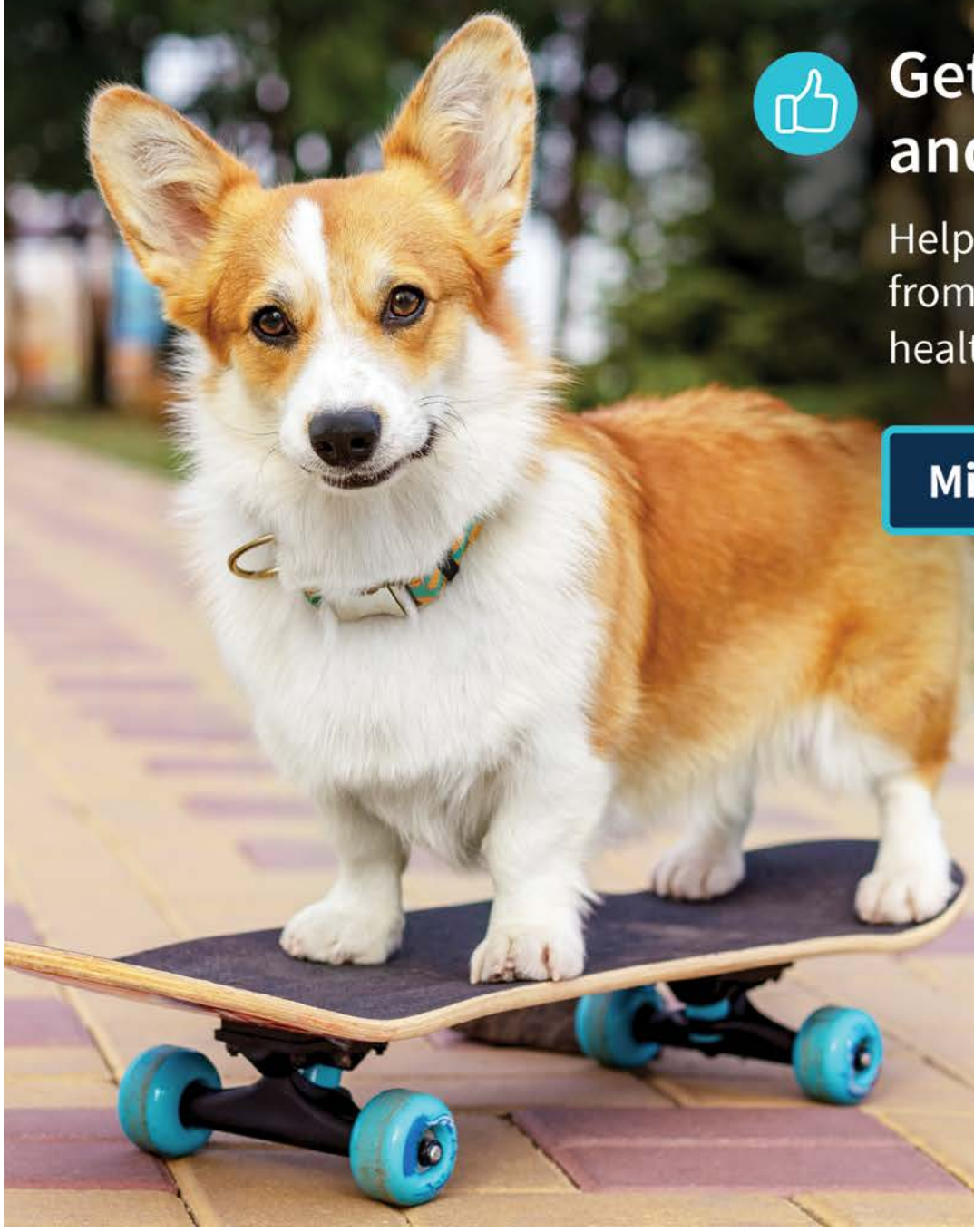
Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein

There are enough things out there going viral.



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